



International Advocacy Campaign on the State of Democracy and Rule of Law in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Center for Support to the Strengthening of Civil Society and Good Governance in the D.R. Congo (CARSOC) hereby makes public the information note entitled ***“The State of Democracy, Rule of Law, and Socio-Political Forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo from the Beginning of 2026. What Should Be Done?”*** (attached).

This campaign aims to raise awareness within the international community about the domestic political challenges facing the DRC, in order to encourage renewed engagement in interventions aimed at consolidating democracy and the rule of law in the country.

CARSOC would like to invite all actors committed to promoting democracy and the rule of law worldwide to contribute by amplifying this information campaign within their respective networks of stakeholders (both public and private) working in this field.

Indeed, in these difficult times when democracy is declining across the world, it is more urgent than ever for major (Western) democracies to **assist peoples confronted with emerging autocrats, by strengthening their capacities for resistance and collective struggle**. The two essential avenues for action are, first, **strengthening the mobilization capacities of local civil societies** and, second, **increasing pressure on national political authorities**.

To achieve this, Western civil societies could play a pivotal role in re-engaging their respective governments on this issue. Congolese civil society is also counting on all these actors to support its **Strategic Action Plan to Defend Democracy and the Rule of Law in the Democratic Republic of Congo 2026–2030** (document to be provided).

For CARSOC,
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International Advocacy Campaign

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY, RULE OF LAW, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL FORCES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO SINCE EARLY 2026 WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The Deconstruction of Congolese Democracy in Brief:

- **2011:** President Joseph Kabila amended the 2006 Constitution to change the presidential election from two rounds to a single round — a configuration that favored his re-election.
- **2018:** An opposition candidate who lost the presidential election, Mr. Félix Tshisekedi, was substituted for another opposition candidate who actually won the election, Mr. Martin Fayulu, to become President of the Republic — because the outgoing regime had decided to share power with him.
- **2021:** An institutional coup was carried out in the National Assembly to grant President Félix Tshisekedi a parliamentary majority, in open violation of the laws of the Republic.
- **2023:** Voting machines were distributed to supporters of the ruling power to stuff ballot boxes during the chaotic general elections of December, which were moreover organized in open violation of the laws of the Republic.
- **2026:** On May 6, 2026, President Félix Tshisekedi reconfirmed in a press conference his plan — first announced in October 2024 — to hold a constitutional referendum to amend the 2006 Constitution, which bars him from seeking a third presidential term. A referendum whose process and outcome are certain to be manipulated, defiantly, as for the 2018 and 2023 elections.

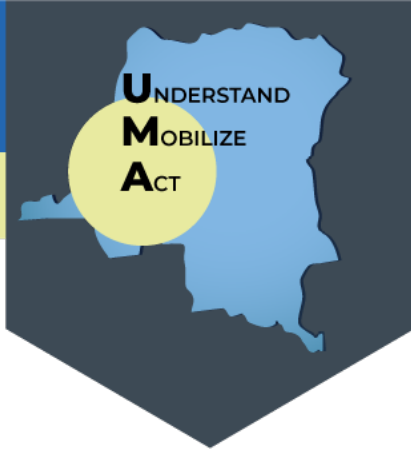
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The deconstruction of democracy and the rule of law—which had only begun to take root in the Democratic Republic of Congo since the adoption of the 2006 Constitution and the organization of general elections that same year—started under the regime of Joseph Kabila (2001–2018).

By way of illustration, this process included the 2011 constitutional amendment that replaced the two-round presidential election with a single-round system in order to increase the incumbent President’s chances of victory; the refusal to organize elections in 2016 with the aim of securing a third presidential term, despite the constitutional prohibition; and the substitution of the winner of the 2018 presidential election, Mr. Martin Fayulu, with one of the defeated candidates, Mr. Félix Tshisekedi, who was proclaimed President of the Republic after agreeing to share power with the outgoing President Joseph Kabila, who had ultimately been unable to run again.

This dynamic of democratic backsliding then accelerated under President Félix Tshisekedi’s regime. It notably manifested itself through the illegal overturning of the parliamentary majority in 2021; a mode of governance marked by persistent and deliberate violations of the law and the Constitution; a deliberately flawed electoral process in December 2023, characterized by the targeted distribution of voting machines to supporters of the ruling power to facilitate electoral fraud; and the official announcement, in October 2024, of a constitutional reform project aimed at enabling a third presidential term. After having been put on hold in 2025 due to military pressure from the AFC/M23 rebellion, marked by the capture of the cities of Goma and Bukavu, this project was reactivated in 2026 by those in power in Kinshasa. To illustrate their determination, the Second Vice-President of the Senate, Mr. Modeste Bahati Lukwebo—an influential member of the presidential majority—was forced to resign after publicly opposing the project during a press conference on March 4, 2026. To prevent any future dissent!

In his press conference of May 6, 2026, President Félix Tshisekedi reconfirmed his plan: a **constitutional referendum** and a **third term** “if the people request it” through that referendum. Following this announcement, the National Assembly and the Senate adopted the referendum law in June 2026. In light of the 2018 and 2023 elections, there

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is little doubt about the outcome of such a referendum if it is indeed organized. The President also confirmed that the **2028 elections would not be organized** as long as parts of North Kivu and South Kivu remain under rebel occupation, while nonetheless maintaining his referendum project. Yet this occupation did not prevent him to organize the 2023 elections, which simply excluded certain occupied territories of North Kivu.

Since the beginning of 2026, explicit and deliberate violations of the civil and political rights of Congolese citizens—already observed since the second half of 2025—have further demonstrated the advanced decline of democracy and the rule of law, in a clear trajectory toward the consolidation of an authoritarian regime in the DRC. These violations are manifested notably through:

- **Harassment, nighttime abductions, and arbitrary arrests of dissenting voices:**
 - Aubin Minaku, Emmanuel Shadari, John Kabamba, Stéphane Shisso, Nathanaël Onokomba, Papy Mawesi, Dunia Kilanga, Parole Kamizelo, Norbert Yamba Yamba, etc.
- **Forced exile of opposition party leaders and other civic actors:**
 - Joseph Kabila, Matata Mponyo, Moïse Katumbi, Seth Kikuni, Claudel Lubaya, Frank Diongo, Jean-Claude Vuemba, Pero Luwara, etc.
- **Suspension or prohibition of activities of opposition political parties,** particularly those that chose to align with the former President of the Republic within the “Sauvons la RDC” platform.

This process of dismantling democracy and the rule of law stems primarily from the determination of the ruling elites to perpetuate their political dominance and preserve a predatory system. Its implementation is facilitated by the structural and chronic weaknesses of internal social and political forces.

The disintegration and demobilization of Congolese civil society as a militant social force—except for the notable role of the leadership of the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in Congo—are now highly advanced. This situation continues to worsen as democracy and the rule of law regress. Yet, under such circumstances, the

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opposite dynamic would have been desirable, in order to keep alive the struggle for political freedoms and socio-economic rights. If this reality is not corrected quickly, Congolese society will remain an easy prey for the dictatorial ambitions of any ruler, including those emerging from the political opposition—a reality clearly illustrated by the current President.

The severe weakening of opposition political parties constitutes another major reality that leaves the ruling power without any real counterweight. Their inconsistency and lack of coherence in political struggle over the last four electoral cycles have ultimately eroded public trust, with populations increasingly becoming unresponsive to their calls for mobilization. This political weakening affects both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition. Before the 2023 elections, there still existed within the institutions a parliamentary opposition capable of influencing institutional political dynamics. Today, it has been reduced to around 20 deputies out of 500 in the National Assembly, none in the 26 provincial assemblies, and only 3 senators out of 100 in the Senate.

One actor that had begun to exert a balance of power capable of significantly influencing the political actions of the central government was the AFC/M23 rebellion, supported by Rwanda, particularly after the capture of the cities of Goma and Bukavu in January and February 2025. However, following the signing of the DRC-Rwanda Peace Agreement in Washington on December 4, 2025, and the subsequent loss of its military leverage, the AFC/M23 is now politically weakened. This loss of leverage is all the more evident as the government in Kinshasa is no longer eager to negotiate, with the objective of postponing the 2028 elections by invoking the continuation of the conflict. It should be noted that the exploitation of Rwanda's aggression as political capital in domestic politics has been pushed to the extreme since the beginning of the rebellion, in contrast to the numerous other armed conflicts currently underway across the country.

Finally, the growing fatigue of the international community with the inconsistency and lack of credibility of Congolese political actors has led to near-indifference regarding issues of democracy and the rule of law in the DRC. After exerting strong pressure on Joseph Kabila's regime between 2016 and 2018 to prevent a third term, the international

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community has gradually accommodated the multiple assaults on the fragile Congolese democracy by the current government. This attitude has given the latter greater latitude to pursue—and even intensify—the violations of civil and political rights outlined above.

In this context, it is important to consider how the December 2025 USA-DRC “mining agreement” is becoming an accelerator of the destruction of Congolese democracy. Indeed, considering that large portions of this agreement remain confidential, here is how President Félix Tshisekedi used it to justify his constitutional reform project during a press conference on May 6, 2026: **“The Americans demanded certain reforms that must be carried out within the justice system, and these reforms cannot be implemented without revising the Constitution. So, are you going to forbid us from revising it because there are two or three nobodies who don’t want the Constitution to be touched, and we are going to condemn an entire country, an entire nation, just to please those two or three nobodies?”**

What if this alleged U.S. request was merely aimed at protecting its nationals from prosecution for offenses committed in the context of implementing this agreement?

However, the most serious issue is the subordination of the country’s Constitution to a commercial contract and to the demands of another State, in defiance of national institutions and of the Congolese people, whose voices opposing both the contract and the constitutional change are being silenced.

Finally, the U.S. government is reportedly being solicited—through questionable lobbying that may involve corruption—to politically strengthen the power in Kinshasa by interfering in Congolese domestic politics. A notable example would be the U.S. sanctions or threats of sanctions on Congolese political opponents, such as the highly debated sanctions imposed on former President Joseph Kabila on April 30, 2026, under the pretext that these individuals undermine the implementation of the DRC-Rwanda peace agreements. Yet all indications suggest that ensuring the implementation of the mining agreement has become the determining factor behind the actions of the U.S. government aimed at securing the full cooperation of President Tshisekedi.

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What Should Be Done?

Rebuilding a strong and mobilizable civil society across the entire country, on the one hand, and re-mobilizing the international community (mostly the **middle powers** capable of compensating for the current posture of the U.S. administration) so that it re-engages with Congolese political issues, on the other hand, these are the two urgent actions that are required to safeguard democracy and the rule of law in the DRC.

Indeed, there are in the DRC two major civil society structures whose leaderships have demonstrated unwavering commitment to Congolese democracy: the Catholic Church of Congo and the Protestant Church in Congo. These are also the two institutions with an effective presence throughout the national territory, through parish networks attended by more than 85% of Congolese citizens. At the local level, these parishes are the best-organized and best-resourced structures, both in terms of infrastructure and human resources, composed of active lay elites. All these factors make these two institutions the foundation for rapidly rebuilding a strong and mobilizable civil society. The urgency of organizing these lay parishioners is clear.

To re-mobilize the international community, it is up to Congolese civic elites committed to democracy and the rule of law to undertake credible advocacy efforts. They must quickly form teams composed of new, competent, and trustworthy figures in whom international actors can once again place confidence. The goal is to secure two commitments from these actors: **substantial support for the rapid reconstruction of a mobilizable Congolese civil society**, and **increased pressure on Congolese authorities**.

The inclusive national dialogue so often demanded—for which the leaders of the two aforementioned Churches have made significant efforts since January 2025, but to which the government in Kinshasa continues to oppose itself—remains essential for defining a credible roadmap to safeguard democracy and the rule of law in Congo. The struggle for its realization must continue. However, in the absence of structured social forces and effective political pressure—both internal and external—capable of compelling the government to comply with the resulting roadmap, it risks remaining a dead letter.

For CARSOC,
the Management.

This document is partially IA translated from French

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