

The DR Congo is bracing for election results and it's likely to get bloody. Here's what you need to know

Written by Susan Hutchinson, PhD Candidate, Australian National University

When Congolese gynaecologist Dr Denis Mukwege [received his Nobel Peace Prize](#) a few months ago, he inferred responsibility for what happens in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to everyone who owns a smart phone. As well as diamonds and oil, the country is rich in the gold, coltan and cobalt vital to the production of the smart phone in your pocket.

But it is also rich in strife. The DRC is holding its breath while the electoral commission decides the results of elections held on December 30, 2018. The Congolese constitution [limits presidents](#) to two five-year terms. But current president, Joseph Kabila, has now been president for 18 years.

But that may be about to change. Martin Fayulu, the man supported by a former rebel commander who had been previously charged ([but later acquitted](#)) with allowing rape and crimes against humanity under his leadership, may have won the election away from the ruling party.

But though one of the most trusted institutions in the country, the Catholic church – which deployed tens of thousands of election observers – announced it knew of a clear winner, the results can only legally be declared by the electoral commission. And the commission [announced further delays](#) in the results over the weekend.

Read more: [Poll in the DRC looms. But the election is unlikely to bring change](#)

In the meantime, however, the New York Times has [announced Fayulu's](#) win. Anticipating violence and unrest, the US has [sent troops to neighbouring countries](#) to protect US citizens and diplomatic facilities.

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Meanwhile, the UN's [Security Council](#) met to discuss the issue on Friday. Although the meeting was closed to the public, it is known the Council was unable to agree on steps forward. There is to be another meeting in an open session in New York on Tuesday.

So, what is actually going on in the DRC?

Who were the lead candidates?

President Joseph Kabila had [handpicked the government's candidate](#) to run in the elections. [Emma nuel Ramazani Shadary](#)

had been Interior Minister and enjoyed the full resources of the government for his campaign, including unlimited access to state-run media outlets.

Shadary is [subject to an EU travel ban](#), asset freeze and sanctions. This is due to his role in obstructing Congo's electoral process and carrying out a crackdown against protesters angry over the vote which had been delayed for years.

The government is good at [repressing political opposition](#). During previous elections, SMS communication was cancelled. But this year the government also [turned off the internet](#). Key independent radio and television programs [have been closed](#) and reporters ejected from the country.

In turn, opposition parties have struggled to form coalitions or campaigns to topple the government democratically. In a landmark sign of cooperation, seven opposition parties banded together to endorse a single candidate, Martin Fayulu, to run against the ruling party's pick.

But that agreement barely lasted 24 hours before the parties with the largest membership [with drew their support](#) to run their own leaders instead.

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After the pact collapsed, former warlord, Jean-Pierre Bemba maintained his support for Fayulu. Bemba had returned to the DRC after [being imprisoned](#) at the Hague for charges he allowed his troops to use sexual violence in war crimes and crimes against humanity when he deployed them to the neighbouring Central African Republic. Bemba's [conviction was later](#) overturned on technical grounds.

Read more: [**Bemba acquittal overturns important victory for sexual violence victims**](#)

Despite this record, he was a popular choice to run against the current president but was deemed ineligible by the electoral commission due to witness tampering charges that had been upheld by the International Criminal Court. So, Fayulu prevailed.

Fayulu is a wealthy businessman, a [former Manager at Exxon Mobil](#) who has been politically active in opposition for many years. He was even injured when government forces fired on opposition protesters in the capital in 2006.

He has promised to create an environment conducive to business and investment in the DRC, and [to revise mining and oil contracts](#). This won't necessarily improve the lives of the average person as oil is [seen as a driver](#) of conflict and displacement in the parts of the country with such reserves.

What happens now?

Many state functions fail in the DRC. The [country ranks](#) 176 out of a possible 189 on the Human Development Index. In the [late](#) [st Reuters Poll](#), it came in as the seventh worst country in the world to be a woman. An estimated 70% of Congolese have [little or no access](#) to health care. Serious diseases are rife, with

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[a current Ebola outbreak in the country](#)

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The electoral commission has [made questionable decisions](#) about the election logistics in the years and months leading up to the poll. Early in December one of their warehouses was burned to the ground, including the thousands of electronic voting machines stored there.

An electoral commission warehouse in the DRC.

In the lead up to the election, more than one million voters who live in largely opposition-held areas (and those facing the Ebola outbreak) were told they [would not be allowed to vote](#) for health and security reasons. But [mock elections were staged](#) in the area to show they were able to do so.

The [United Nations Security Council published a report](#) of “major security incidents including attacks against civilians, security forces and United Nations peacekeepers in many provinces,” as well as illegal importation of military materiel. [Human Rights Watch have reported](#) violence, widespread irregularities and voter suppression during the election.

Read more: [***What DRC's flawed election means for emerging democratic culture in Africa***](#)

Given Fayulu is not the government candidate, [further violence](#) is likely. The President has shown his reluctance to let go of power. He and his party have the capacity to either announce Shadary the winner of the election, regardless of the count; or to simply refuse to give up power.

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Either way, it is looking more and more likely it will get bloody.

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