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By Dr. Janette Yarwood

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An anti-government protestor, center, is arrested by Congo riot troops, during a protest against a new law that could delay elections to be held in 2016, in the city of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Monday, January 19, 2015. (Source: AP Photo/John Bompengo.)

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Emmerson Mnangagwa, left, Vice President of Zimbabwe, chats with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe after the swearing-in ceremony at State House in Harare, Friday, December, 12, 2014. Mnangagwa was sworn in following a cabinet reshuffle that saw former deputy President Joice Mujuru dismissed from her post, over allegations that she plotted to remove the Zimbabwean President from power. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

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IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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The political climate in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is tense before the presidential election scheduled for late next year, when President Joseph Kabila's mandate is set to expire. Kabila, who has been in office for 14 years, has given no indication of whether he will run for a third term. Although a government spokesperson has [said](#) that Kabila intends to respect the constitution, opponents [suggest](#) that the government will use technical delays to justify postponing the presidential election.

## Protests and Crackdown

Kabila has been in office since 2001, when he became president at the age of 29 after his father, former president Laurent Désiré Kabila, was assassinated. The younger Kabila played a key role in negotiating [peace agreements](#) with rebel forces and the Sun City agreement that ended the war. Kabila then won disputed elections in 2006 and 2011, but he is constitutionally barred from standing for a third term.

In January 2015, citizens in DRC [hit the streets en masse](#) in opposition to legislative changes that called for a census before the 2016 election. Many saw this census requirement as an attempt by Kabila to stay in office beyond his two-term limit—some critics [estimated](#) that it could take up to three years to organize a national census because of the ongoing conflicts in the northeast and the lack of paved roads throughout the country. The anti-government protests were [violent](#), with hundreds of arrests and more than 40 deaths. There were also [reports](#) that Kabila responded by cutting off the Internet and blocking mobile text messaging in an attempt to halt the unrest. Following the nationwide protests, the Senate amended the controversial bill and removed the clause mandating a national census before the 2016 presidential election. “We have listened to the street. That is why the vote today is a historic vote,” Senate President Leon Kenga Wa Dondo [said](#) after the amendment was passed.

[In March 2015](#), activists from Senegal's *Y'en a Marre* (We're Fed Up) movement and Burkina Faso's Le Balai Citoyen (Citizen's Broom), along with several journalists and Congolese activists and a U.S. diplomat, were detained after a press conference just outside of Kinshasa. The local NGO *Filimbi* had invited the activists to the DRC for a series of workshops and events. All in attendance were arrested. While the U.S. diplomat was released, the activists were accused of entering DRC to destabilize the country, declared *personae non gratae* and subsequently expelled.

The next month, a mass grave was discovered in Maluku, an area about 80 kilometers from Kinshasa. Human rights groups are concerned that it may contain the bodies of missing protestors. A [judicial enquiry](#) into the mass grave was opened at the request of the United Nations Joint Office for Human Rights (BCNUDH) in the country. On June 8, the families of 34 missing protestors filed a public complaint with Congo's national prosecutor requesting the exhumation of the mass grave.

## Découpage and Dialogue

On March 2, Kabila set a 120-day deadline for the implementation of [découpage](#), “a constitutional change introduced in 2006 intended to divide Congo's 11 provinces into 26. . . . The delay is not surprising given that *découpage* is one of the most complex processes that the government has had to grapple with since the official end of the war.” The government has neither budgeted for the process nor designed an implementation plan. In pursuing *découpage* now, Kabila may be able to extend his term by claiming he needs additional time and money to complete the rezoning of the DRC's political map.



An anti-government protestor, center, is arrested by Congo riot troops, during a protest against a new law that could delay elections to be held in 2016, in the city of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Monday, January 19, 2015. (Source: AP Photo/John Bompengo.)

In early June, Kabila called for a [dialogue](#) with the political opposition, prominent church officials, traditional leaders, and other members of civil society. Some opposition leaders are skeptical and fear that the talks could be yet another Kabila tactic to delay the presidential vote. There are [splits](#) emerging within the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), the oldest opposition party. Long-time opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, 82, has been in Belgium receiving medical treatment. UDPS members and most other opposition parties have refused to participate in the talks, but Tshisekedi's son, Felix Tshisekedi, has agreed to meet with Kabila. His participation in Kabila's dialogue has divided the UDPS party. Furthermore, there are [concerns](#) that Felix could be offered a high post, opening the way for power sharing, which could help Kabila soften public opposition if he tries to stay in office. Felix Tshisekedi rejects suggestions that he wants to join Kabila's government.

## Conclusion

In recent years, citizen uprisings have been a key factor in acting as a counterbalance to governments that lack a strong, organized opposition. The most recent Afrobarometer surveys, conducted between 2011 and 2013, [show](#) that it is now the norm for citizens across Africa to support term limits. The survey found that in 34 countries, about three-quarters of citizens favored limiting presidential mandates to two terms. Afrobarometer surveys also revealed that most Africans reject authoritarianism, military rule, and one-party rule. The surveys' findings on term limits appear to hold in the DRC, where citizens are watching Kabila's actions closely and are willing to engage in mass protest to keep him from securing a third term or extending his term in office.

It is unclear whether Kabila's attempts to stay in office will be successful. Regardless of when the elections are held, the regime is likely to secure another mandate, with Kabila or another presidential candidate, if the divisions within the opposition persist. The opposition, therefore, would be well advised to engage in coalition building in addition to monitoring the ruling party's efforts to keep Kabila in office.

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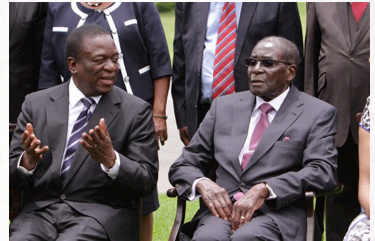
## Major Splits in Both ZANU-PF and Opposition

As reported in [earlier editions](#) of *Africa Watch*, both ZANU-PF and the opposition in Zimbabwe are currently dealing with major splits in their ranks. ZANU-PF has been riven by a fierce succession struggle over who will eventually replace Mugabe. The long-running battle between factions aligned to former Vice President Joice Mujuru and current Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa (who was formerly the justice and defense minister) intensified in the run-up to and after the party's congress in December 2014. Immediately after the congress, Mugabe installed Mnangagwa as Mujuru's replacement. Since then, ZANU-PF has expelled [hundreds](#) of officials linked to the Mujuru faction. Concurrently, senior officials have publicly [criticized](#) the ruling party in an unprecedented fashion. On April 7, 2015, Mujuru's faction [announced](#) the formation of a new party, stating that the party would also be called ZANU-PF, but the PF would stand for "People First."

On the other side of the political spectrum, the opposition has also been mired in a leadership struggle dating back to its overwhelming defeat in the July 2013 elections. In January 2014, Tendai Biti, the former MDC-T secretary general and finance minister, broke ranks with Tsvangirai over his continued leadership of the party, forming the MDC Renewal Team. The MDC Renewal Team later joined Welshman Ncube's smaller MDC faction, branding the new party as the UMDC, which was officially [launched](#) in March 2015. The UMDC, however, has struggled to get off the ground. It has been stricken by infighting, with co-president of the party, Sekai Holland, [resigning](#) her post shortly after the party's official launch and senior official Elton Mangona [breaking](#) away and forming his own party on June 3. UMDC's decision to boycott the by-elections has also caused turmoil, leading other officials to [resign](#) from their posts.

## Pre-election Violence

Although MDC-T and UMDC boycotted the polls, ZANU-PF did not enjoy a smooth campaign period, because a [record](#) number of former ZANU-PF officials—believed to be aligned to Mujuru—formed a [coalition](#) and ran as independents. The ruling party [suspected](#) that the coalition of independent candidates had ties to MDC-T. In the run-up to the poll, ZANU-PF cracked down on the independents. There were reports of pre-election [violence](#) in Hurungwe West and other constituencies. Hurungwe West independent candidate Temba Mliswa, who was the former chairman of ZANU-PF in Mashonaland West before his expulsion from the party, was arrested, and his supporters were [assaulted](#) by ZANU-PF youths during the campaign. Mliswa [asserted](#): "The six village heads were accused of supporting me and subsequently beaten. The assault was perpetrated in full view of the nine ZRP [Zimbabwe Republic Police] officers in a Land Rover and members of the President's Office present." Despite the violence aimed at him, he remained outspoken, [saying](#), "I am not afraid. . . there is so much desperation [in ZANU-PF], I see it."



Emmerson Mnangagwa, left, Vice President of Zimbabwe, chats with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe after the swearing-in ceremony at State House in Harare, Friday, December, 12, 2014. Mnangagwa was sworn in following a cabinet reshuffle that saw former deputy President Joice Mujuru dismissed from her post, over allegations that she plotted to remove the Zimbabwean President from power. (Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi.)

## Conclusion

While full results of the by-elections are not yet available, [preliminary](#) returns suggest that independent candidates failed to make inroads against ZANU-PF. Although both ZANU-PF and the opposition are suffering from factionalism, the opposition's boycott appears likely to further cement the ruling party's parliamentary majority in Zimbabwe. As a result, the boycott is unlikely to help push electoral reforms forward, at least in the near term. A 2010 study by the Brookings Institution [finds](#) that election boycotts worldwide rarely work; instead, "electoral boycotts generally have disastrous consequences for the boycotting party, rarely result in desired international attention or sanction, and many times further entrench the ruling leader or party." [Research](#) by political scientist Steffan Linberg on election boycotts in Africa reached a similar conclusion: "boycotting strategies tend to derail rather than promote democratization."

A likely win for ZANU-PF will allow Mugabe to claim a short-term victory and some momentum moving forward to the 2018 elections. That said, deep splits in ZANU-PF, Mugabe's old age, and Mnangagwa's perceived lack of broad popular support suggest that things could change significantly for ZANU-PF by the 2018 polls. Without Mugabe in the picture, opposition candidates may have a real shot at competing. From the opposition's perspective, if any positive is to be taken from the by-elections, it is that MDC-T and UMD C were able to remain aligned on the issue of boycotts, which may prove to be a helpful building block in forging a more cohesive opposition alliance in the run-up to the 2018 elections.

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