

# TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

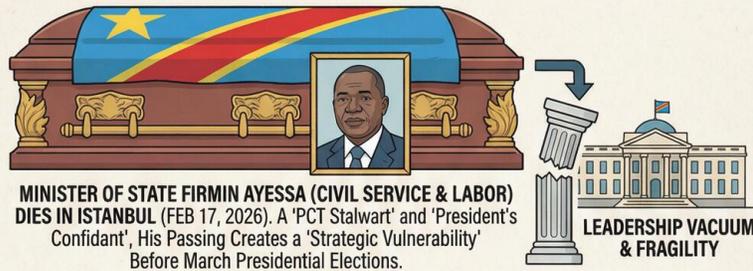
## TELECONGO

FEBRUARY 17, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

### CONGO: CRITICAL LEADERSHIP VACUUM, PRE-ELECTION MANEUVERING & INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION (FEB 2026)

A Nation at a Strategic Crossroads Following the Death of Senior Minister Firmin Ayessa



**PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL MANEUVERING: THE DJAMBALA 2026 CONCERTATION**

DJAMBALA 2026: National Unity & Electoral Transparency?

Fair Play National Unity

SKEPTICISM: Failed Reforms (Biometrics, Finance Caps)

Majority Opposition

**ELECTORAL SECURITY & 'ANTICIPATED VOTE' (FORCE PUBLIQUE)**

**URBAN INSECURITY & PUBLIC SPACE CLEARING (Brazzaville Déguerpissement & Taxi-Moto Murder)**

**'INFRASTRUCTURE AS LEGITIMACY' NARRATIVE: MISSION 300 & COLISSA**

**KITEKE HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT (MISSION 300) - 510 MW**  
World Bank & China Energy Partnership. Part of 4.5GW Target for 'Energy & Digital Autonomy'.

**PROJECT COLISSA (FIGA FUND)**  
Micro-Credits for Artisans. 'Social Pacification' via Micro-Interventions for Youth Employment.

**TENSION BETWEEN RHETORIC & REALITY**

**STATE CAPACITY EFFORTS:** Vocational Standards & Universal Health Insurance

**STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & KEY IMPLICATIONS**

**SHORT TERM (1-4 WEEKS):** Mourning-Fueled PCT Consolidation, Potential Opposition Protests at Djambala.

**MEDIUM TERM (1-6 MONTHS):** High-Security March Elections ('Anticipated Vote' Test), Pressure for Kiteke Progress.

**LONG TERM (1-5 YEARS):** Potential Energy Shift, but Lack of 'Intergenerational' Succession Plan is a Critical Risk.

**INTERNATIONAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS:** Reassess Inner Cabinet Contacts; Monitor Election Technical Legitimacy; Note Deepening Turkish Ties.

**PRIVATE SECTOR/INVESTORS IMPLICATIONS:** Energy Opportunities (Kiteke), Regulatory Risk (CAMU Health Protocols), Expect Urban Disruption (Logistics).

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THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO  
FACES A CRITICAL LEADERSHIP  
VACUUM FOLLOWING THE DEATH  
OF A SENIOR MINISTER AMIDST  
HIGH-STAKES PRE-ELECTION  
POLITICAL MANEUVERING AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION.

### DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

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February 17, 2026, was defined by a seismic shift in the Congolese political landscape following the sudden death of Minister of State Firmin Ayessa in Istanbul, Turkey. Ayessa, a stalwart of the ruling Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT) and a key confidant of President Denis Sassou Nguesso, held the portfolio for Civil Service and Labor. His passing occurs at a strategically vulnerable moment for the administration, just weeks before the presidential elections scheduled for March 12 and 15, 2026. The government is currently engaged in the "Djambala 2026" political concertation, an attempt to project national unity and electoral transparency, though opposition factions remain vocal about the persistent failure to implement previous recommendations regarding biometrics and campaign finance limits. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

Simultaneously, the administration is pushing an aggressive "infrastructure as legitimacy" narrative to bolster the President's re-election bid. Significant progress was reported on "Mission 300," a World Bank-backed energy initiative, including the launch of feasibility studies for the 510 MW Kiteke hydroelectric plant in partnership with China Energy. This is coupled with the rollout of the "Colissa" micro-credit program via the FIGA fund, targeting small-scale entrepreneurs in the regions. While the state emphasizes development and "living together," rising urban insecurity—highlighted by the brutal murder of a taxi-moto driver over a negligible sum—and the forced clearing of public spaces in Brazzaville underscore the tension between the regime's lofty rhetoric and the daily realities of domestic stability. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

### MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

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- **Death of Minister of State Firmin Ayessa**
  - The government officially announced the death of Firmin Ayessa, Minister of State for Civil Service, Labor, and Social Security, in Istanbul, Turkey, due to illness. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
  - Ayessa was a central figure in the PCT elite, a member of the Political Bureau, and a key strategist for the 2015 constitutional change. ([Source](#))
  - The PCT and Senate President Pierre Ngolo characterized the loss as a "disaster" occurring at a "bad moment" for the upcoming presidential campaign. ([Source](#))

- **Djambala 2026 Political Concertation**

- Nearly 300 delegates from the majority, opposition, and civil society gathered in Djambala to discuss the governance of the March 2026 elections. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makoso urged "fair play" and a focus on national unity. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- Opposition figures expressed deep skepticism, noting that only 6 of 12 recommendations from the 2022 Owando concertation were implemented, with critical items like biometrics and campaign spending caps ignored. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

- **Electoral Security and the "Force Publique" Mobilization**

- General Guy Blanchard Okoi, Chief of the General Staff, finalized the security strategy for the March elections, emphasizing vigilance against "protean and hybrid threats" and social media disinformation. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- Specific focus was placed on the "anticipated vote" for security forces on March 12, intended to allow them to maintain order during the general vote on March 15. ([Source](#))

- **Launch of Kiteke Hydroelectric Project (Mission 300)**

- The Minister of Energy launched feasibility studies for the Kiteke dam (510 MW) near Linzolo, a flagship project under the World Bank/African Development Bank "Mission 300" program. ([Source](#))
- The project involves China Energy and Lincoln Group, with construction estimated to take 4-5 years starting in 2027. ([Source](#))

- **State-Led Micro-Credit Expansion (Project Colissa)**

- The FIGA (Fund for Impulse, Guarantee, and Support) distributed nearly 200 million CFA francs in micro-credits to 900 artisans and entrepreneurs in the Bouenza department. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))
- This program is explicitly tied to President Sassou Nguesso's vision for economic diversification and youth employment. ([Source](#))

## **KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS**

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- **Geopolitics and International Relations**

- Deepening ties with Turkey evidenced by the death of Ayessa in a Turkish hospital and the Turkish Ambassador's direct condolence visit to the Prime Minister. ([Source](#))
- Continued reliance on Chinese state capacity for critical infrastructure, specifically China Energy's role in the national power grid expansion. ([Source](#))
- Audience with a UN-affiliated delegation (UNF) led by Nicolas Rodin, proposing technology to help the state "capture" lost revenue from digital "gray markets" like Google and Meta SMS traffic. ([Source](#))

- **Domestic Stability and Social Order**

- The Gendarmerie arrested a 21-year-old suspect for the murder of a taxi-moto driver in Brazzaville, an act that triggered intense public concern over urban crime. ([Source](#))
- The Brazzaville Mayor issued a 72-hour ultimatum for the clearing of public sidewalks and streets of illegal commercial activities and tire repair shops. ([Source](#))

- **State Capacity and Succession**

- The loss of Firmin Ayessa removes a veteran administrator from the Labor and Civil Service ministry during a period of civil service reform and pre-election civil unrest risks. ([Source](#))
- Launch of the first National State Diploma for BTS (Higher Technician's Certificate), signaling an attempt to centralize and standardize vocational qualifications. ([Source](#))

- **Energy and Infrastructure Statecraft**

- Mission 300 targets 4,500 MW of reserves near Brazzaville to address the city's chronic energy crisis and fuel the Special Economic Zones. ([Source](#))
- Minister of Energy Émile Wosso identified six hydroelectric sites (Linzolo, Kiteke, Kinangui, etc.) as the future pillars of Congolese industrialization. ([Source](#))

- **Legislation and Policy**

- **Universal Health Insurance (CAMU):** Discussion of the 2025 decree standardizing therapeutic protocols and the start of biometric card distribution in pilot cities (Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, Oyo). ([Source](#))
- **Electoral Reform Recommendations:** Debate over the non-implementation of biometrics and campaign finance caps from the 2022 Owando accords. ([Source](#))
- **BTS National Diploma Decree:** New state-level recognition for higher technician certificates. ([Source](#))
- **Public Domain Regulation:** Municipal decree ordering the clearing of trottoirs and illegal vulcanization shops. ([Source](#))

## LEGISLATION/POLICY

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Governance efforts centered on standardizing state benefits and tightening urban regulations. The administration is prioritizing the Universal Health Insurance (CAMU) rollout and vocational education standards, while municipal authorities are reasserting control over public space in the capital through aggressive *déguerpissement* (eviction) policies.

- **Caisse d'Assurance Maladie Universelle (CAMU) Protocols:** Implementation of mandatory therapeutic protocols ("Conduites Thérapeutiques Recommandées") to standardize healthcare costs and quality across public and private clinics. ([Source](#))
- **National BTS State Diploma:** Formalization of the Higher Technician's Certificate as a state-signed degree to improve professional employability. ([Source](#))
- **Brazzaville Public Domain Clearing Decree:** A municipal order requiring illegal occupants of sidewalks and streets to vacate within 72 hours under threat of force. ([Source](#))
- **Project Colissa Finacial Framework:** Policy enabling FIGA to bypass classic banking circuits to provide micro-credits (50,000 to 1,000,000 CFA) to the informal sector. ([Source](#))

Press events included the official funeral announcements for Minister Ayessa and the opening ceremony of the Djambala Political Concertation, where opposition leaders publicly challenged the government's record on implementing past reforms. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

## DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

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### • **The Fragility of the "Natural Candidate" Narrative**

- The media is heavily saturated with the "242 reasons to support Denis Sassou Nguesso" campaign, portraying him as the "infatigable builder" and "guarantor of peace." ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- However, the sudden death of Minister Ayessa—described as one of the "four pillars" of the state alongside Pierre Ngolo and Jean-Jacques Bouya—reveals the mortality and potential succession fragility within the President's inner circle. ([Source](#))
- The intense focus on Sassou Nguesso as the "champion" suggests a narrowing of the regime's political base to a personality-driven cult rather than institutional stability. ([Source](#))

### • **Strategic Energy and Digital Autonomy**

- The administration is pivotally aligning with "Mission 300" to solve energy deficits, viewing the Fleuve Congo's potential as "geopolitical statecraft." By targeting the power needs of Brazzaville and Kinshasa, the Congo seeks to position itself as a regional energy hub. ([Source](#))
- Parallel to energy, there is a burgeoning interest in "capturing" digital revenue. The meeting with the UN-affiliated delegation regarding the "gray market" of SMS traffic indicates a state looking for new, non-petroleum revenue streams via digital oversight. ([Source](#))

### • **Social Pacification via Micro-Interventions**

- Unable to provide large-scale industrial employment, the state is relying on highly visible, regional distributions of micro-credits (Project Colissa) and the opening of "correctional" centers like Hobeville for delinquent youth. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- This trend reflects a "firefighting" approach to social unrest: providing small financial injections to the regions and militarized "mental change" training for youth in conflict with the law to maintain order ahead of the March vote. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

## STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

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- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** A period of national mourning for Firmin Ayessa will likely be used by the PCT to consolidate its base and generate sympathy for the administration. Expect the Djambala concertation to conclude with vague promises of "unity" that ignore the opposition's specific demands for biometric voting, potentially leading to small-scale protests or a boycott announcement by factions like UPADS. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The March elections will likely proceed with a high degree of "Force Publique" visibility. The success of the "anticipated vote" on March 12 will be a bellwether for the military's loyalty. Post-election, the government will face immediate pressure to show "first stones" for the Kiteke project to satisfy the World Bank's Mission 300 criteria. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** If the Mission 300 hydroelectric sites move to construction, Congo's economic dependency may shift from petroleum to regional electricity exports. However, the reliance on aging figures like the late Ayessa highlights a critical risk: the regime lacks a clear "intergenerational" plan for leadership if the current "builders" continue to pass away without clear successors. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

## RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

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### For International Policy:

- The death of Ayessa signals a shift in the "inner cabinet." Diplomatic missions should reassess their points of contact within the Labor and Civil Service ministries, as these roles are critical for managing social stability. ([Source](#))
- The opposition's complaints at Djambala suggest that the March 2026 election may lack technical legitimacy. Monitoring bodies should focus on the "anticipated vote" process for the Force Publique. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- The Turkish-Congolese relationship is maturing beyond commerce into a strategic partnership involving high-level healthcare and political support. ([Source](#))

### For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Energy Opportunities:** The launch of the Kiteke study opens secondary markets for engineering, environmental monitoring, and logistics firms, especially those with ties to Chinese financing. ([Source](#))

- **Regulatory Risk:** The new CAMU health protocols and biometric cards will change the landscape for private clinics and pharmaceutical importers. Compliance with these standardized "therapeutic conduits" is now a prerequisite for state-reimbursed care. ([Source](#))
- **Urban Disruption:** The 72-hour Brazzaville sidewalk clearing order indicates a period of municipal volatility. Logistics and delivery firms should expect traffic disruptions and localized tension in the capital's commercial districts. ([Source](#))

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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**Today's Media Trends** is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

**No data is used to train or tune any AI model.**

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominant themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify rel-

evant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

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