

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TELECONGO

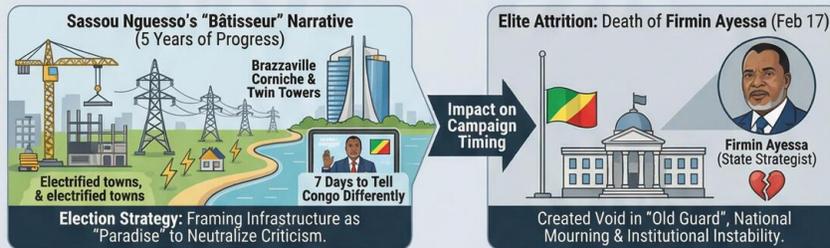
FEBRUARY 20, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

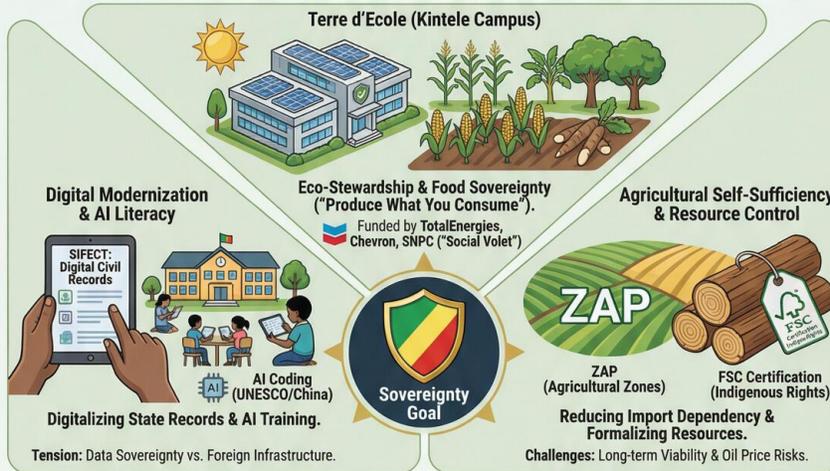
CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE: PRE-ELECTION POSTURING & STRATEGIC SHIFTS (February 2026)

Elite Attrition, Sovereignty Initiatives, and Security Ahead of March Vote.

THE "BÂTISSEUR" ELECTION STRATEGY & ELITE SHIFT



SOVEREIGNTY INITIATIVES: INFRASTRUCTURE, ENVIRONMENT & DIGITAL TENSION



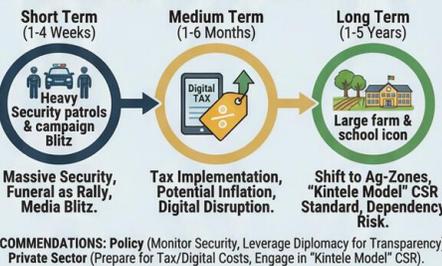
SECURITY MILITARIZATION & DIPLOMATIC MOVES



ECONOMIC STATECRAFT & POLICY REFORM (2026 Finance Law)



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & KEY IMPLICATIONS



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CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE STRATEGIC SNAPSHOT: PRE-ELECTION POSTURING AMID ELITE ATTRITION AND SOVEREIGNTY INITIATIVES

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 20, 2026, in the Republic of the Congo was defined by a transition from high-level state mourning to aggressive pre-election signaling by the administration of President Denis Sassou Nguesso. The sudden death of Firmin Ayessa, a Minister of State and veteran political strategist, has created a void in the "Old Guard" just weeks before the March 2026 presidential election. The government responded with a massive display of "state as builder" (le bâtisseur) propaganda, culminating in the high-profile inauguration of the "Terre d'Ecole" (Earth School) campus in Kintele. This project, funded by oil majors including TotalEnergies and the SNPC, serves as a dual-purpose tool for the regime: projecting an image of environmental stewardship to the international community while domesticating the "sovereignty" narrative through agricultural self-sufficiency for the youth.

Simultaneously, the Constitutional Court finalized the list of seven presidential candidates,

setting the stage for a short, intense campaign starting February 28. Security forces, specifically the Gendarmerie, have transitioned to a high-readiness posture, combining election security with a crackdown on urban gangs (Kuluna). In the diplomatic sphere, Congo-Brazzaville is positioning itself as a central mediator in the Libya crisis and a lead advocate for African representation on the UN Security Council. Economically, the state is pushing a "digital modernization" agenda, introducing new taxes on digital terminals and pollution in the 2026 Finance Law, while attempting to formalize its mining sector through new American investment.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Elite Politics: Death of Firmin Ayessa and National Mourning**
 - The death of Minister of State Firmin Ayessa in Istanbul on February 17 has triggered a period of national mourning and institutional instability within the civil service. Ayessa was credited with integrating nearly 50,000 youth into the civil service and overhauling the status of state agents ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - Prime Minister Anatole Collinet Makosso held an extraordinary cabinet meeting to organize the funeral, which will take place in Ayessa's birthplace of Makoua ([Source](#)).
 - Mourning also extended to Emilie Manima, the country's first female minister (appointed in 1975), whose official tribute was attended by President Sassou Nguesso ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Presidential Election: Constitutional Court Validates Seven Candidates**

- The Constitutional Court stopped all appeals and finalized the list of seven candidates for the March 12 (force publique) and March 15 (general) vote. Candidates include the incumbent Denis Sassou Nguesso, independent Ephrem Dave Mafoula, and Joseph Kignoumbi Kia Mboungou ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- The campaign is scheduled to begin officially on February 28, 2026 ([Source](#)).
- A national civic education campaign has been launched to mobilize voters and prevent "manipulation" during the election cycle ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Infrastructure and Environment: Inauguration of Terre d'École**

- President Sassou Nguesso inaugurated the Christophe de Margerie campus in Kintele, a 15-hectare site dedicated to combining traditional curriculum with agricultural and environmental training ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- The project is funded via "Social Volet" oil production sharing contracts involving TotalEnergies, Chevron, and SNPC, with a budget of approximately \$7 million ([Source](#)).
- The school is positioned as a "laboratory" for food sovereignty, teaching children to "produce what they consume" ([Source](#)).

- **Diplomatic Pivot: AU Summit and International Partnerships**

- Foreign Minister Jean-Claude Gakosso represented the President at the 39th AU Summit in Addis Ababa, advocating for the "Ezulwini Consensus" regarding UN Security Council reform ([Source](#)).
- Congo is strengthening ties with China for the rehabilitation of colonial-era railroads and the creation of a trade corridor to the Central African Republic ([Source](#)).
- Engagement with Italy's "Mattei Plan" was highlighted, focusing on energy, infrastructure, and technology transfer ([Source](#)).

- **Internal Security: Gendarmerie Strategic Planning**

- The National Gendarmerie held its 2025/2026 planning conference, focusing on "Operation Zero Kuluna" to eradicate urban banditry and ensure "sterile" conditions for the upcoming election ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- New territorial units were established, increasing gendarmerie regions from 12 to 15 to better distribute competencies between the police and gendarmerie ([Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

• **Domestic Stability & Civil Unrest**

- Humanitarian aid is being deployed to the Pool and Plateaux departments following unspecified "dramas" and the displacement of populations due to the presence of armed groups. Security forces are under pressure to prevent these groups from disrupting the March elections ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- The government is using micro-credits (Kolisa-Figar) to pacify restless youth in Mouyondzi and Yamba, distributing checks ranging from 250,000 to 700,000 CFA francs ([Source](#)).

• **Economic Statecraft & Investment Climate**

- The US Gerald Group is seeking to resolve ownership issues regarding mining assets in Congo, signaling a potential expansion of American mining interest in the country's rich mineral subsoil ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Congo has assumed the rotating presidency of FAGAS (African Guarantee and Economic Cooperation Fund), aiming to increase the impact of development financing ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

• **Digital Modernization & AI**

- The SIFECT (Integrated System of Civil Status Facts) is being implemented to digitalize birth, marriage, and death records, moving away from fragmented manual systems ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- UNESCO and Chinese firm Codemao are providing tablets and coding training to pilot schools to bolster AI literacy ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Architect Bertal K. released a book on Congolese cybersecurity, highlighting that Congo is the 132nd most attacked country globally and lacks updated legal frameworks ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

• **Legislation & Regulatory Reform**

- **Finance Law 2026:** Reduces corporate tax (IS) from 30% to 28%, introduces a 1% minimum perception tax, and creates new taxes on polluting activities and digital terminals ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Law 21-89 Revision:** The government is finally implementing decrees for the 2022 law regulating civil servants, replacing texts that dated back to the 1960s ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Forestry Code:** Enforcement of "Sustainable Management Plans" (PAD) and FSC certification for timber exports, with a focus on indigenous (Pygmy) rights and conservation of "sacred trees" ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

The governance focus has shifted toward finalizing the 2026 fiscal framework and modernizing outdated administrative laws. Key policy debates center on election transparency recommendations and the digitalization of state records to curb fraud and improve revenue collection.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Finance Law 2026:** Major reform of corporate tax structures and the introduction of "green" and "digital" taxes. Includes provisions for immediate taxation of capital gains in balance sheet revaluations ([Source](#)).
- **Code of Labor Revision:** In the final stages of revision to align retirement ages with the general civil service status ([Source](#)).
- **ISO 17021/1 Standards Integration:** A national committee is meeting to align Congolese auditing and management certification with international mirror standards ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Djambala Political Dialogue:** A follow-up to the Owando 2022 talks. Evaluated 12 recommendations for election governance; only 6 were fully implemented. Opposition continues to demand full biometric voting and caps on campaign spending ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Gendarmerie Evaluation Conference:** A two-day intensive diagnostic of security operations for 2025 and tactical planning for 2026 election security ([Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

• The "Bâtitseur" Narrative as Election Strategy

The administration is flooding the airwaves with content celebrating 5 years of progress under President Sassou Nguesso. The recurring theme is that DSN is an "in-fatigable builder" who has constructed over 1,000km of power lines and 80 electrified towns ([Source](#)). The "7 Days to Tell Congo Differently" campaign, utilizing Ivory Coast influencers like Camille Makosso, is a clear attempt to bypass domestic skepticism and "Kuluna" unrest by highlighting infrastructure like the Brazzaville Corniche and the new Twin Towers ([Source](#), [Source](#)). By framing infrastructure as a "paradise" compared to neighbors like the RDC, the regime seeks to neutralize complaints about unemployment and high food prices.

• Resource Sovereignty vs. Foreign Dependency

There is a visible tension between the government's rhetoric of "sovereignty" and its reliance on foreign capital. The "Terre d'Ecole" initiative promotes the idea of a self-sufficient Congo that "consumes what it produces," specifically cassava and corn, to end dependency on imports ([Source](#), [Source](#)). However, the infrastructure for this "sovereignty" is funded almost entirely by French and American oil interest (Total, Chevron). Similarly, the push for digital sovereignty requires infrastructure (Data Centers) built through foreign partnerships, while the actual data management is being pushed toward local Congolese administrators to satisfy nationalist requirements ([Source](#)).

- **Security Militarization and Urban Pacification**

Internal security policy is hardening as the election approaches. The focus on "Operation Zero Kuluna" and the expansion of Gendarmerie regions suggests that urban crime is viewed as a potential catalyst for political instability ([Source](#)). The emphasis on "discipline" and "ethics" within the blue-uniformed forces indicates a concern regarding the loyalty or conduct of security personnel during the sensitive polling period in March ([Source](#)). Furthermore, the integration of humanitarian aid with "pacification" in the Pool department shows that the regime is using a carrot-and-stick approach to maintain control in formerly rebellious regions ([Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a massive increase in security patrols in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire as "Operation Zero Kuluna" ramps up before the February 28 campaign start. The funeral of Firmin Ayessa will serve as a de facto political rally, consolidating the ruling party's base in the northern regions. The 7 candidates validated by the court will begin a media blitz, though the incumbent's "bâtitseur" campaign will likely dominate the airwaves.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): Post-election, the government will likely implement the more aggressive revenue-collection measures found in the 2026 Finance Law, specifically targeting digital transactions and "polluting" industries. This could trigger localized inflation or pushback from the small business sector. The launch of the SIFECT digital civil status system will begin its pilot phase in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, potentially disrupting

the informal economy surrounding administrative paperwork.

Long Term (1-5 Years): The focus on "Terre d'Ecole" and agricultural zones (ZAP) indicates a multi-year shift toward reducing the import bill for staples. If successful, this could slightly insulate the Congo from global grain price shocks. However, the reliance on oil majors to fund "social volets" creates a long-term risk: if oil production declines or global prices stay low, the maintenance of these sophisticated schools and hospitals will fall to a state that currently lacks the capacity to fund them autonomously.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Security Oversight:** Monitor the "Operation Zero Kuluna" closely; there is a risk that gang crackdowns could be used as a pretext for suppressing opposition youth movements during the election window.
- **Diplomatic Engagement:** Leverage Congo's chairmanship of the FAGAS and its AU mediation roles to push for greater transparency in the distribution of climate and environmental funding, particularly regarding the "Three Basins" initiative.
- **UNSC Reform Support:** Acknowledge the African common position (Ezulwini Consensus) in bilateral talks to gain favor with Congolese diplomats who view this as a legacy issue for Sassou Nguesso.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Tax Compliance Risk:** Companies must prepare for the new 1% minimum perception tax and the increased scrutiny on "polluting activities" under the 2026 Finance Law. The shift from 30% to 28% IS is a positive, but the new digital terminal taxes will increase operational costs for tech-heavy sectors.
- **Mining Sector Opportunity:** The US-Congo mining discussions suggest an opening for western firms to challenge Chinese dominance in the mineral subsoil, provided they can navigate the Gerald Group ownership complexities.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Investors in the energy sector should expect the "Kintele Model" (Terre d'Ecole) to become the new standard for CSR. Future contracts will likely mandate the funding of high-tech, eco-friendly infrastructure as part of the "Social Volet."

ABOUT THIS REPORT

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 dominate 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 relevant 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.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. You can also learn more about the GDEL Project at <https://blog.gdelproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.