

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TELECONGO

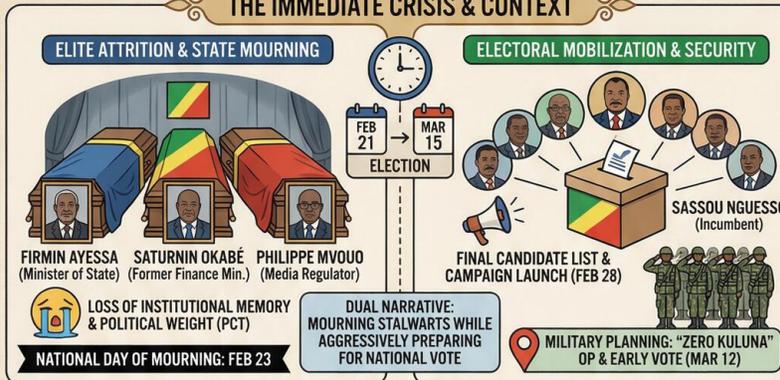
FEBRUARY 21, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

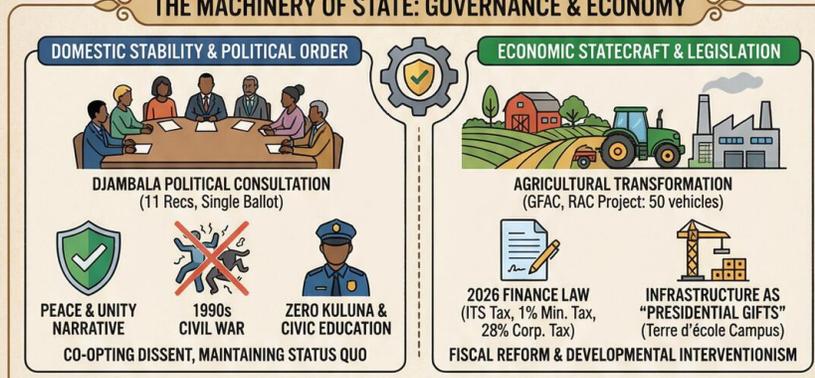
ELECTORAL MOBILIZATION AND ELITE ATTRITION IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO: A 2026 OUTLOOK

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE: DUAL NARRATIVE OF MOURNING & ELECTION PREP (FEB 21, 2026)

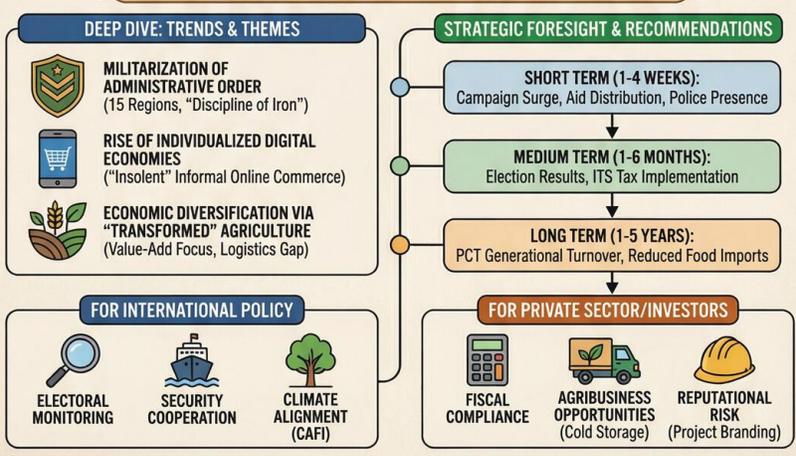
THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS & CONTEXT



THE MACHINERY OF STATE: GOVERNANCE & ECONOMY



THE PATH FORWARD: TRENDS & STRATEGIC FORESIGHT



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FEBRUARY 21, 2026

ELECTORAL MOBILIZATION AND ELITE ATTRITION IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 21, 2026, marks a critical juncture for the Republic of the Congo as the state grapples with the simultaneous challenges of high-level leadership transitions and the looming March 2026 presidential election. The political landscape is dominated by a dual narrative: the mourning of significant regime stalwarts—Minister of State Firmin Ayessa, former Finance Minister Saturnin Okabé, and media regulator Philippe Mvouo—and the frantic administrative preparations for a national vote. The Constitutional Court has finalized a list of seven candidates, including the incumbent President Denis Sassou Nguesso, setting the stage for a campaign period scheduled to begin on February 28. The administration is aggressively utilizing state media to project a vision of "peace and unity" through political consultations in Djambala, while simultaneously reinforcing security apparatuses through military planning conferences and the installation of new regional commanders.

Economic statecraft is focused on two primary pillars: agricultural self-sufficiency and fiscal reform. The conclusion of the first Grand Agricultural Fair (GFAC) highlights a strategic shift toward domestic food transformation and the resolution of logistical bottlenecks through the "RAC" (Relais Agricole du Congo) project. Meanwhile, the rollout of the 2026 Finance Law introduces significant changes to the tax code, including the introduction of the Impôt sur les Traitements et Salaires (ITS), designed to enhance purchasing power and modernize fiscal transparency. However, beneath the surface of developmental progress, the state is heavily reliant on personality-driven governance, as evidenced by the proliferation of hagiographic literature and the framing of infrastructure projects like the "Terre d'école" campus as personal gifts from the presidency rather than institutional achievements.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Finalization of Presidential Candidate List:** The Constitutional Court has officially validated seven candidates for the March 2026 election. The list includes incumbent Denis Sassou Nguesso (Presidential Majority), Dave Uphrem Mafoula (Independent), Joseph Kignoumbi Kia Mboundou (La Chaîne), and others. This sets the definitive field for the upcoming campaign ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Succession and Elite Attrition:** The deaths of Minister of State Firmin Ayessa, Saturnin Okabé, and Philippe Mvouo represent a significant loss of institutional memory and political weight within the ruling PCT (Parti Congolais du Travail) and the state apparatus. A national day of mourning has been declared for February 23 ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Military Activity Planning for 2026:** The Congolese Armed Forces (FAC) and the Gendarmerie concluded high-level planning conferences focusing on the "Zero Kuluna" operation (targeting urban gangs) and the specific security requirements for the March 15 presidential election, including the early vote for security forces on March 12 ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Consensus at the Djambala Political Consultation:** Political actors from the majority, opposition, and civil society concluded three days of talks aimed at "sanitizing" the electoral environment. The meeting produced 11 recommendations, including the use of a single ballot and efforts toward biometric voter identification, though the latter remains a point of contention regarding implementation timing ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Infrastructure and Ecological Education Launch:** President Sassou Nguesso inaugurated the "Terre d'école" campus in Kintélé, a pilot project in partnership with TotalEnergies and other oil majors. The project aims to integrate traditional academic learning with environmental management and agricultural skills ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Domestic Stability & Social Order

- The Gendarmerie is prioritizing the "Zero Kuluna" operation to combat rising grand banditry and urban crime ahead of the elections ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Civic education campaigns are being deployed to neighborhood chiefs to prevent electoral abstention and misinformation ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- Security forces in the Pool and Plateaux regions are receiving specific directives on neutrality and professionalism during the electoral period ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Economic Statecraft

- The 2026 Finance Law introduces the ITS (Impôt sur les Traitements et Salaires), replacing the IRPP, and sets a 1% minimum perception tax for businesses, aimed at broadening the tax base ([Source](#)).
- The "Relais Agricole du Congo" (RAC) initiative aims to deploy a fleet of 50 transport vehicles to prevent post-harvest losses in remote departments ([Source](#)).
- Congo has assumed the presidency of FAGACE (African Fund for Guarantee and Economic Cooperation), signaling an intent to leverage regional financial mechanisms for local development ([Source](#)).

International Relations

- Diplomatic missions to Namibia focused on historical anti-colonial ties and current cooperation in the energy and telecommunications sectors ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Ongoing partnership with the CAFI (Central African Forest Initiative) focuses on forest governance and sustainable land management ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Succession & Stability

- The simultaneous funerals of high-level officials serve as a rallying point for the ruling PCT, emphasizing loyalty to President Sassou Nguesso's "vision" ([Source](#)).
- Prominent leaders like Isidor Mvouba are acting as mediators to ensure cohesive aid distribution in the restive Pool department ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Legislation

- **2026 Finance Law:** Modifies the tax code, reduces corporate tax to 28%, and introduces digital terminal taxes ([Source](#)).
- **Electoral Law (Modified):** Specifically Article 48, governing the validation of presidential candidates ([Source](#)).
- **Decree No. 2026/426:** Declares national mourning for Firmin Ayessa ([Source](#)).
- **Administrative Reorganization Law:** Increases military and gendarmerie regions from 12 to 15 ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

The governance focus has shifted toward the practical implementation of the 2026 Finance Law and the legal framework for the upcoming presidential elections. Legislative updates are currently centered on administrative decentralization and the modernization of tax collection to offset potential economic fluctuations during the election year.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **2026 Finance Law:** A comprehensive overhaul of fiscal policy including the introduction of the Impôt sur les Traitements et Salaires (ITS) and a reduction in corporate tax from 30% to 28% ([Source](#)).
- **Electoral Framework Revisions:** Recommendations from the Djambala concertation suggest revisitation of administrative boundaries and the technical evaluation of decentralization ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Maritime Governance Act:** A proposed uniform act on maritime law and the creation of a specialized maritime institute ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Ernest & Young Law Presentation:** A technical briefing for economic actors on the 2026 Finance Law's implications for business operating costs and payroll ([Source](#)).
- **CSLC New Year Tributes:** The media regulator warned journalists against the use of AI-generated "deepfakes" and misinformation during the election cycle ([Source](#)).
- **Constitutional Court Declaration:** Official announcement of the valid presidential candidates and the rejection of potential appeals ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The "Peace and Unity" Narrative as an Electoral Shield

A pervasive theme across all news segments is the intentional linking of the incumbent's name with "peace" and "stability." This is not merely campaign rhetoric but a core state doctrine. By hosting political consultations in Djambala and involving the opposition, the government is attempting to co-opt potential dissent and frame any future electoral protest as a threat to national harmony. The transcripts show a systematic effort to portray the 1990s civil wars as the alternative to current leadership, using historical trauma to maintain the status quo ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Economic Diversification via "Transformed" Agriculture

There is a visible trend toward agricultural industrialization. The Minister of Agriculture's tour of the fair highlighted that Congolese producers are moving beyond raw goods to

"transformation" (e.g., banana wine, cocoa butter). However, the chronic lack of transport infrastructure remains the "missing link." The RAC project's plan to buy 50 vehicles suggests the state is returning to a more interventionist role in the economy to subsidize logistical failures that the private sector refuses to touch ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Militarization of Administrative Order

The expansion of military regions from 12 to 15 indicates a deepening of the state's security footprint. The transcripts detail not just routine command changes but a "discipline of iron" being instilled in the ranks. The focus on "Zero Kuluna" and maritime governance suggests the state is increasingly viewing domestic order and resource protection through a purely military lens, likely to ensure total control during the March vote ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

The Rise of Individualized Digital Economies

An "insolent" trend (as described in transcripts) is the shift of skilled professionals (doctors, teachers) toward unregulated "online commerce" and "arrivals." State media frames this as a potential danger to "state capacity," fearing that the informal digital economy is siphoning off the nation's educated elite and complicating tax collection ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks)

- The official campaign launch on February 28 will see a massive surge in state-sponsored rallies and the distribution of humanitarian aid in departments like the Pool to secure voter loyalty ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Expect heightened police presence in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire under the "Zero Kuluna" banner to suppress gang activity before candidates begin touring ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Medium Term (1-6 Months)

- The presidential election results (March 15) are likely to be challenged by the 6 opposition/independent candidates, but the Constitutional Court's recent "final" ruling suggests these challenges will be legally blocked ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- Implementation of the new ITS tax will begin affecting public and private sector payrolls, potentially causing minor friction as workers adjust to the new deductions ([Source](#)).

Long Term (1-5 Years)

- The loss of senior leaders like Firmin Ayessa will force a generational turnover within the PCT, potentially leading to factionalism as the party looks toward an eventual post-Sassou Nguesso era ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- The "Terre d'école" model and agricultural transformation efforts, if successful, may reduce the Congo's reliance on food imports from the DRC and Cameroon, improving currency stability ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy

- **Electoral Monitoring:** Observers should focus on the March 12 "early vote" for security forces, as this is a new mechanism being utilized to ensure deployment on the main election day ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Security Cooperation:** Partners should note the Congo's pivot toward maritime security and "blue economy" sovereignty, which may open avenues for naval training and anti-piracy equipment sales ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Climate Alignment:** Engagement with Congo on carbon credits and forest management remains a high-priority entry point for diplomatic influence, given the state's focus on the CAFI partnership ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

For Private Sector/Investors

- **Fiscal Compliance:** Companies must immediately review their payroll systems to accommodate the ITS (Impôt sur les Traitements et Salaires) and the new 1% minimum perception tax introduced in the 2026 Finance Law ([Source](#)).
- **Agribusiness Opportunities:** There is an urgent need for cold storage and logistics infrastructure. The state's inability to solve post-harvest transport issues represents a high-potential area for private logistical firms under PPP models ([Source](#)).
- **Reputational Risk:** Investors in infrastructure should be aware that projects are often branded as "Presidential Gifts," which can complicate long-term asset management and political neutrality ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

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 GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Ar-

chive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.