

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

TELECONGO

FEBRUARY 22, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT

CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE STRATEGIC BRIEF: ELECTION PREPAREDNESS AMIDST ELITE ATTRITION AND INFRASTRUCTURE PUSHES

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE: February 22, 2026 - High-Stakes Election Focus, Infrastructure Wins & Elite Loss

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS & GOVERNANCE SNAPSHOT

March 15, 2026 - Presidential Elections



VALIDATION OF 7 CANDIDATES:
Incumbent Denis Sassou Nguesso confirmed.
Challengers: Kignoumbi Kia Mboungou, Nganguia Engambé, Gavet, Manangou. State signals institutional strength.



NATIONAL MOURNING (Feb 23):
Death of Minister of State Firmin Ayessa, a key "Grand Commis de l'Etat" & strategist, triggers mourning. Significant loss of institutional memory.



CAMPUS TERRE D'ÉCOLE INAUGURATION:
TotalEnergies-backed complex. Combines academic & agricultural training. Part of "The Builder" narrative.



MILITARY COMMAND SHIFTS:
New commanders in Zone 6 (Infondo) & Zone 2 (Dolisie). Focus on strategic stability.



ENERGY GRID EXPANSION (Pool Region):
Electrification nearly 90% complete in Luingi, Boko, Loumo. Aiming for national grid connection.



U17 FOOTBALL CRISIS:
Public feud between Ministry of Sports & Fecofoot over team disqualification. Exposes bureaucratic dysfunction.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS, THEMES & POLICY



THE ARCHITECTURE OF SUCCESSION & "THE BUILDER":
Narrative of "Consolidation" over "Change." Incumbent linked to major projects (Corniche, rural electrification). Disproportionate coverage suggests managed transition.



MATERNAL FIGURES & "WOMEN IN SCIENCE" PUSH:
State communications highlight female achievements (50th anniv. women in military, Prof. Francine Toumi) to appeal to female electorate and modernize image.



INTERNATIONAL ENERGY MAJORS AS STATE PARTNERS:
Dependency on oil revenue & CSR for basic education & environmental goals. TotalEnergies & SNPC as primary educators.

LEGISLATION & POLICY FOCUS

- ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE:** Proposals for biometric voter ID, campaign finance caps.
- MARITIME GOVERNANCE:** Push for uniform maritime law & specialized jurisdictions (Gulf of Guinea security).
- HEALTH POLICY:** Holistic pediatric AIDS & malnutrition care project (Tobikisa Mouana).



GEOPOLITICS:
Angola recognizes Sassou Nguesso (Gold) EU "Global Gateway" multimodal corridors (Pointe-Noire to regional capitals).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT, RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

SHORT TERM (1-4 Weeks)

- Official Campaign Start (Feb 28)
- Heightened PCT mobilization.
- Increased security patrols under "Strategic Anticipation".
- Major show of unity at Ayessa's funeral.

MEDIUM TERM (1-6 Months)

- March 15 Vote: Likely Sassou Nguesso victory.
- Post-election focus on ZLECAF 2030 goals & EU multimodal corridors.
- Potential resistance in Pool electrification.

LONG TERM (1-5 Years)

- Cabinet Reshuffle inevitable due to deaths of "Old Guard".
- Energy security relies on "Friendship Energy Loop" with Angola/DRC.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

INTERNATIONAL POLICY

- SECURITY COORDINATION:** Monitor "Anticipation Strategique" for overreach.
- MARITIME ENGAGEMENT:** Opening for legal/security cooperation.
- DEVELOPMENT ALIGNMENT:** Target "Resilient Cities" projects (Nkayi, Owando).

PRIVATE SECTOR/INVESTORS

- ENERGY SECTOR:** Growing market for mid-stream electrical equipment & renewables (E2C, "Friendship Loop").
- ACRO-INDUSTRIAL:** State support for pork, banana, tuber value chains.
- REGULATORY ALERT:** Rising nationalist sentiment (debate on "Code Noir") may impact contract negotiations.

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DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

February 22, 2026, in the Republic of the Congo was characterized by a concerted state effort to project stability and continuity ahead of the high-stakes presidential elections scheduled for March 15, 2026. The day's coverage focused heavily on the formal validation of seven presidential candidates by the Constitutional Court, confirming the incumbent, President Denis Sassou Nguesso, as the central figure in a race featuring both veteran challengers and new political entrants. This formalization of the democratic process is being leveraged by the state to signal institutional strength, even as the government grapples with the recent loss of several "grand commis de l'état" (high-level civil servants), most notably Minister of State Firmin Ayessa, whose death in Turkey has triggered a period of national mourning ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

The administration is simultaneously executing a multi-pronged strategic narrative of

"The Builder" (Le Bâtitseur), using the inauguration of the TotalEnergies-backed "Campus Terre d'École Christophe de Margerie" and ongoing electrification projects in the Pool region to demonstrate developmental momentum. These infrastructure wins are framed as the fruits of the President's vision for "Zonal Agricultural Protection" (ZAP) and energy independence. However, underlying tensions remain visible, particularly in the sports sector where a public feud between the Ministry of Sports and the Football Federation over the disqualification of the U17 national team highlights persistent bureaucratic dysfunction and lack of inter-agency coordination ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Validation of Presidential Candidates:** The Constitutional Court officially validated seven candidates for the March 2026 election. The list includes incumbent Denis Sassou Nguesso (PCT/Majority), veteran challengers Joseph Kignoumbi Kia Mboungou (La Chaîne) and Anguios Nganguia Engambé (PAR), and newcomers such as Melène Destin Gavet (Mouvement Républicain) and Vivien Romain Manangou ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **National Mourning for Firmin Ayessa:** A national day of mourning is declared for Monday, February 23, following the death of Firmin Ayessa, Minister of State for Civil Service. Ayessa was a pivotal figure in the Sassou Nguesso administration, serving as a former Director of Cabinet and a long-term communications strategist ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Inauguration of Campus Terre d'École:** President Sassou Nguesso inaugurated a major educational complex in Kintélé. The 15-hectare campus, funded by TotalEnergies EP Congo and the SNPC, aims to integrate traditional academic learning with environmental and agricultural training ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Military Command Shifts:** Significant rotations in the military hierarchy were finalized, including new commands for Zone 6 (Infondo) and Zone 2 (Dolisie), alongside the inauguration of a new commander for the Marien Ngouabi Military Academy ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Energy Grid Expansion in Pool:** The Société Énergie Électrique du Congo (E2C) reported that electrification works for the Luingi, Boko, and Loumo districts are nearly 90% complete, with the goal of connecting these underserved areas to the national grid by late March ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **U17 Football Crisis:** A public blame-shifting exercise erupted between the Ministry of Sports and the Fecofoot (Football Federation) following the failure to register the national U17 team for the Unifac zonal tournament, exposing deep rifts in state sports management ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

- **Geopolitics and International Relations:**
 - Angola recognized President Sassou Nguesso with a Gold Medal of Honor during its 50th independence celebrations, highlighting Congo's historical role as a strategic ally to the MPLA ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - The EU Ambassador, Anne Marchal, emphasized the "Global Gateway" strategy, focusing on multimodal corridors connecting Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville, Bangui, and N'Djamena ([Source](#)).
 - Diplomatic ties were reinforced with Namibia through new agreements on political consultations and vocational training ([Source](#)).
- **Domestic Stability & Social Order:**
 - The Ministry of Civic Education launched a nationwide campaign to encourage "responsible participation" in the vote and to combat disinformation ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - Religious leaders from the Kimbanguist Church and Islamic Council were enlisted to promote a "culture of peace" during the electoral period ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **State Capacity and Infrastructure:**
 - Road works on the Ngoni-Léssanga axis (30km) are progressing to facilitate agricultural transport to Brazzaville ([Source](#)).
 - The "Grande Foire Agricole" at Bombo-ma-Ngali is being utilized as a "wholesale market" hub to stabilize food prices, specifically targeting pork and banana consumption ([Source](#)).

- **Elite Politics & Succession:**
 - The sudden deaths of Firmin Ayessa, Saturnin Okabé, and Émilie Manima within the same month represent a significant loss of institutional memory and "old guard" support for the PCT during an election year ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Legislation:**
 - Decree No. 2026/426: Declaring national mourning for Firmin Ayessa on Feb 23, 2026 ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
 - Validation of the 2026 Budget for the Pokola Municipal Council ([Source](#)).
 - Implementation of the ZLECAF (African Continental Free Trade Area) protocols remains a central policy goal for 2030 ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

Governance focus centered on the executive branch's use of decrees to manage the sudden loss of key ministers and the formalization of the upcoming election through the Constitutional Court. Policy discussions emphasized the transition to "biometric" voter identification and the regulation of maritime governance as essential for future economic sovereignty.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Electoral Governance Recommendations (Djambala):** Proposals include the introduction of electoral biometrics, capping campaign finance, and reducing candidate deposits (cautionnements) ([Source](#)).
- **Maritime Governance Treaty:** A new academic and policy work by Eric Sébastien Dibas-Franck advocates for a uniform maritime law code and the creation of specialized maritime jurisdictions in Congo ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Health Policy (Tobikisa Mouana):** A holistic pediatric AIDS and malnutrition care project (0-5 years) was reviewed for its first semester of implementation ([Source](#)).

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Constitutional Court Verdict:** A public reading confirmed the validity of all seven presidential applications ([Source](#)).
- **Fecofoot Point de Presse:** The federation defended itself against charges of negligence regarding the U17 team, citing the lack of a national championship and the closure of stadiums by the Ministry ([Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Architecture of Succession

Despite being a presidential election year, the narrative is less about "change" and more about "consolidation." State media reinforces the image of Sassou Nguesso as the "Bâtisseur Infatigable" (Indefatigable Builder). This is achieved by tying the incumbent to every major infrastructure project, from the Corniche in Brazzaville to rural electrification in the Pool. The validation of six other candidates provides a veneer of democratic plurality, yet the disproportionate coverage of the PCT's "Grand Champion" suggests a managed transition toward another term rather than a competitive contest ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Maternal Figures and the "Women in Science" Push

There is a strong gender-focused narrative appearing in state communications. The celebration of the 50th anniversary of women in the military and the high-profile funeral of Émilie

Manima (the first female minister) are being used to attract the female electorate. This is complemented by the "Women and Girls in Science" events, where Professor Francine Toumi is positioned as a national icon. By highlighting these figures, the government is attempting to modernize its image and appeal to younger, professional women ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

International Energy Majors as State Partners

TotalEnergies and SNPC are increasingly integrated into the social fabric of the state, not just as resource extractors but as primary educators. The "Campus Terre d'École" illustrates a trend where the state relies on oil revenue and corporate social responsibility (CSR) to fulfill basic education and environmental goals. This highlights a dependency on the extractive sector to maintain social order and human capital development ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): The official campaign window begins February 28. Expect heightened PCT mobilization in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. National security forces (Police/Gendarmerie) will likely increase visible patrols under the "Strategic Anticipation" framework to prevent pre-election unrest. The state funeral for Firmin Ayessa on Feb 23 will be used as a major show of PCT unity ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): The presidential vote on March 15 will likely result in a Sassou Nguesso victory, given the institutional backing and fragmented opposition. Following the election, focus will shift to the "ZLECAF 2030" goals and the formalization of the EU-backed multimodal corridors. Resistance or

logistical hurdles in the Pool electrification project may surface if post-election budgets are redirected ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Long Term (1-5 Years): The deaths of several "Old Guard" ministers will necessitate a cabinet reshuffle in the next term, potentially elevating younger figures or those close to the "Christelle Sassou Nguesso" circle. Energy security will hinge on the "Friendship Energy Loop" interconnector with Angola and DRC ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Security Coordination:** Partners should monitor the "Anticipation Strategique" military coordination for signs of overreach during the March 12 (military) and March 15 (civilian) votes.
- **Maritime Engagement:** The shift toward specialized maritime jurisdictions offers an opening for legal and security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea.
- **Development Alignment:** Funding should target the "Resilient Cities" (Villes Résilientes) projects in Nkayi and Owando, which show high local community buy-in.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Energy Sector Opportunity:** The E2C's push for rural electrification and the "Friendship Loop" suggests a growing market for mid-stream electrical equipment and renewables.
- **Agro-Industrial Focus:** The FOIRE AGRICOLE's transformation into a wholesale hub indicates state support for pork, banana, and tuber value chains.

- **Regulatory Alert:** The debate over the "Code Noir" and colonial-era legacies in economic relations suggests a rising "Camite" or nationalist sentiment that could impact future contract negotiations.

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.

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