

The cost of politics in Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dr Camille Forite

August 2024

Disclaimer

The authors have exercised due care and expertise to ensure that the contents of this report are accurate at the time of publication.

The authors accept no responsibility for any loss suffered by anyone as a result of using the content.

All rights in this book, including copyright, are owned by Westminster Foundation for Democracy Limited (WFD) and are protected by UK and international laws. No part of this book may be copied, distributed, translated or adapted without the prior permission of WFD. All rights reserved.

The information and opinions presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the WFD, its founders or the UK Government. WFD or any person acting on its behalf cannot be held responsible for the consequences of the use of the information contained therein.

Author

Dr Camille Forite is an electoral expert with a doctorate in political science. She specialises in issues relating to political financing, the political participation of women and other under-represented groups, and electoral violence. She has taken part in international election observation missions for the Carter Center, the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the UN in more than a dozen countries in Africa, including the DRC, the Middle East, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe.

Acknowledgements

This study is supported by an EU-funded project, WYDE Civic Engagement, led by EPD, the European Partnership for Democracy. The WYDE project is a component of the European Commission's Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative (WYDE). The project aims to strengthen the involvement of young people in democratic processes at national, regional and global levels.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	4
Methodology	4
Historical background	5
The costs of parliamentary politics	6
Election exchanges	6
Between elections	8
Mobilising funds.....	9
Drivers of the costs of politics	11
A voting system that individualises the cost of politics	11
Opacity and controversy over parliamentary remuneration	11
Underfunded political parties.....	12
Implications.....	13
Recommendations.....	14
References	16

Introduction

When it comes to elections and money, it is the issue of financing electoral operations that is most often to the fore in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - a country of nearly 100 million inhabitants that covers an area of more than two million km². The main urban centres are linked by communications networks, but rural areas are poorly connected because of dilapidated or inadequate infrastructure. This poses a real logistical challenge, requiring substantial resources to transport electoral materials. Yet recurrent delays in the disbursement of public funds to finance the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) regularly call into question the Congolese states ability to bear the burden of these costs¹.

Less talked about, the challenges associated with the political financing of candidates raises a number of issues that are directly linked to the conditions in which the democratic game is played. This study looks at the individual expenses incurred by candidates running for elected office, how they raise their funds, and what they choose to invest the money they devote to their electoral and political ambitions on. In line with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's approach to the cost of politics, the entire electoral cycle is considered: from elections to the National Assembly to the elections that will elect MPs for the next term².

The study aims to provide answers to the following questions: how do aspiring MPs and incumbent MPs finance their political ambitions over the course of an electoral cycle? What obstacles do they encounter in mobilising resources? What role do political parties play and what are the main difficulties they face? And what are the most important items of expenditure for political involvement in the DRC?

Methodology

This empirical study draws on a qualitative approach to understanding the costs of politics in the DRC. It is based on a sample of 22 respondents, including elected representatives, former elected representatives and unsuccessful candidates in the 2023 electoral cycle. The study focuses mainly on politicians who have sought or held a seat in the National Assembly. The sample includes an almost equal proportion of women (41%) and men, as well as majority and opposition candidates who campaigned in both urban and rural areas. It also considers the representation of young people (13%) and candidates with disabilities. The interviews were conducted on a semi-structured basis, using open-ended questions.

To complement the data gathered from political players, a focus group of women and young people was used to gather citizens' views on the costs associated with Congolese politics, such as the controversial issue of MPs remuneration and the methods and challenges of financing election campaigns. Finally, discussions with researchers, representatives of civil society and the

international community also provided food for thought on the issues and problems associated with the costs of political involvement in the DRC, particularly for women and young people.

Historical background

In 2002, the Sun City peace agreement brought to an end the second Congo war (1998-2003). It set out the terms for the establishment of a transitional government and a roadmap for the organisation of democratic elections. Following the adoption by referendum of a new constitution in 2005, the first general elections were held in 2006 and saw Joseph Kabila elected president³. Before the end of his term in January 2011, a constitutional amendment introduced a first-past-the-post system for future presidential elections. Despite the disputed nature of presidential and legislative elections held on 28 November 2011, Kabila was re-elected with almost 49% of the vote. The president's coalition also won a majority in the National Assembly, securing 341 seats.

Seven years later, a political crisis caused by the double postponement of scheduled elections came to an end on 30 December 2018, when the DRC experienced its first peaceful political changeover with the election of Félix Antoine Tshisekedi as president. Nevertheless, "the lack of transparency in CENI's counting and results management processes, combined with the widely differing results reported by domestic observers and other sources, seriously undermined the credibility of the official results", according to the conclusions of the Carter Center's electoral expert mission⁴.

The 2023 elections were no less controversial, even though CENI took the liberty of invalidating 82 candidates on the grounds of fraud before the provisional results were announced⁵. Some candidates, including three interviewed for this study, accused CENI of manipulating the results by selling parliamentary seats for between US\$10,000 and US\$25,000 each. International election observers noted that the legal procedures for compiling the results were not followed, undermining the transparency of this part of the process⁶. On 31 December 2023, CENI declared Félix Antoine Tshisekedi, the incumbent president and candidate for re-election, the winner with 73% of the vote. According to the final results of the national legislative elections, the president's party and its allies, grouped within the *Union Sacrée de la Nation* (USN), won a large majority, while the opposition, with barely 30 confirmed seats, was in the minority⁷.

On 22 April 2024, after several weeks of disputes, the list of the 477 elected MPs was made official⁸. But the list was still incomplete, as CENI had cancelled the elections in two constituencies on the grounds of fraud - Masimanimba (Kwilu Province) and Yakoma (North Ubangi Province)⁹. Furthermore, elections were not held in the Kwamouth territories (Maï-Ndombe Province) and in the Masisi and Rutshuru territories (North Kivu Province) due to the continued actions of armed groups. On 5 March 2024, the Constitutional Court nevertheless authorised the elected representatives from these three constituencies from the 2018-2023 term to sit in the National Assembly until elections can be organised¹⁰.

The Congolese National Assembly has 500 seats. MPs are elected by direct universal suffrage for a renewable five-year term. The electoral system varies according to the number of seats to be filled in each constituency, defined by the territory, the city and the grouping of communes for the city of Kinshasa. In constituencies with one seat to be filled, the simple majority system prevails, while in constituencies with two or more seats to be filled, voting is by proportional representation of lists open to a single preferential method, with the rule of the highest remainder being applied. If two or more lists obtain an equal number of votes for the last seat to be filled, the seat is awarded to the oldest candidate.

In 2023, CENI registered more than 25,000 candidates for the 484 seats to be filled in the National Assembly¹¹. In accordance with the admissibility threshold established by Article 22 of the 2022 electoral law, party lists that do not reach 60% of the seats represented are declared inadmissible. However, the introduction of this threshold did not have the desired effect, since instead of limiting the number of candidates, political parties endeavoured to line up a sufficient number of candidates to exceed the threshold¹². For a candidate to be elected, his or her party must have reached a representativeness threshold of 1% of the total number of validly cast votes at national level.

The costs of parliamentary politics

On average candidates surveyed estimated that it would cost around US\$100,000 to run a competitive campaign. With the least expensive campaign costing just US\$3,000 and the most expensive, US\$300,000. On average, they spent \$76,000 on their election campaigns with 65% of the candidates surveyed spending between \$40,000 and \$90,000, and just 17.7% more than \$100,000. The most economical campaign budgets tended to be associated with candidates from under-represented groups such as women, young people and candidates with disabilities. Access to resources is a major challenge that limits the competitiveness of their election bids.

Election exchanges

The respondents agreed that donations to voters represented the largest part of their campaign expenditure¹³. On average, they account for 36% of their total expenditure. Voter expectations are high, and the pressure on candidates to meet them is just as great. For example, it is unthinkable for the candidates surveyed to organise a political rally without at least covering the cost of transport for voters. Otherwise, they say they run the risk of verbal or physical violence¹⁴ and/or, in the best-case scenario, the risk of "voters leaving with the chairs" hired for the occasion. The fear of being the object of violence was unanimously shared by the candidates: "If we don't have money for the voters, we risk being insulted and beaten up" and "if we don't give money, we can be threatened and have stones thrown at us", said two of the people interviewed.

The costs of political involvement in rural and urban areas are balanced. While the cost of transport and logistics is more expensive in rural areas due to poor conditions or the lack of basic infrastructure¹⁵, voters are more demanding of candidates in urban areas in that they ask for more

money. One candidate said that he preferred to stand as a candidate in a rural area because voters are given 2,000 Congolese francs (US\$0.70) compared with 5,000 (US\$1.80) in Kinshasa.

The candidates interviewed said that they gave cash donations of between US\$2 and US\$5 per voter during their political meetings, representing on average between US\$10,000 and US\$15,000 of their total campaign budget. Voters also make lists of their needs, which often include basic foodstuffs or underwear for women, and the candidates select those that they are able to meet. One candidate recalled that during the campaign, voters came to him every day with their requests: "people see politics as a commodity, you don't get a free vote anymore, there are no values any more". Another aspirant was insistent that "for the people of Kinshasa, the elections are the time when they get money out of candidates. It's a time to eat and drink [...]". In addition to individual donations, community donations, such as the purchase of chairs and speakers for churches or sandbags to combat erosion, are included in candidates' budgets.

In addition, voters are now much better informed than they used to be about the income received by MPs and place a price on their vote accordingly. In the view of the majority of people interviewed for this study, the high media profile of the latest increases in emoluments has led to an increase in the material and financial demands made by voters on MPs and, as a domino effect, on aspiring MPs. One candidate recalled that "before, emoluments were lower and not known [to the general public], but since then the 'give and take' rule has prevailed". Because of the lack of confidence in the Congolese political elite, the immediacy of individual needs takes precedence over the uncertainty of political promises. The Congolese people's very low standard of living further drives this exchange. In 2023, the World Bank ranks the DRC among the five poorest countries in the world¹⁶. In the words of one candidate, "elections have become a market-like negotiation".

Aspiring MPs complain that incumbent MPs seeking re-election push up the cost of the campaign because of the "pre-campaign" expenses incurred to satisfy the demands of voters who, at the time of the campaign, often make little distinction between a candidate and an MP (for more details, see the section entitled "*Between elections*"). They feel that this is a further disadvantage that leaves little room for a renewal of the Congolese political class. However, in January 2024, prior to the conclusion of the electoral dispute period, 71% of the members of the National Assembly were newly elected¹⁷.

After donations to voters, the purchase of visibility material such as posters, leaflets and banners represented the second largest item of expenditure for candidates, particularly due to the increase in the prices of service providers in the run-up to the elections. Campaign costs were impacted by the relatively unfavourable economic climate in 2023. In his province, one candidate felt that "the economy was in shambles during the campaign" and that "the scarcity of [electricity], fuel and equipment had an impact on the price of campaign materials". On a national scale, inflation reached almost 33%, mainly due to the depreciation of the Congolese franc against the US dollar – it dropped by almost 20% on the official and parallel exchange rates¹⁸ - which fuelled price rises and consequently reduced candidates purchasing power. Nevertheless, some candidates

implemented strategies to mitigate these heightened costs by transporting cheaper campaign materials from neighbouring countries such as the Republic of Congo, or sometimes even from Europe. Last on the list were expenses relating to media visibility - a particular challenge for women -, bonuses for campaign support teams and transport for candidates in rural areas. Half of the candidates surveyed also spent money on security staff, some of them professional, but more often young people were recruited from among their political supporters to provide security.

Without money, a candidate's chances of winning a seat are much reduced, but money is not the only determinant of the vote¹⁹. Other factors such as the ethnicity of the candidates, their connections in the local area, their membership of a political family or promises of employment also determine the choice voters make. In terms of identity, for example, the 2023 elections demonstrated the growing importance of an ethnic dimension in Congolese politics²⁰. Concluding that the 2023 electoral cycle "exacerbated divisions in Katanga, with identity-based and populist discourse", a study by Congolese think-tank Ebuteli reported both the presence of identity-based discourse on social networks and several incidents of electoral violence linked mainly to ethnic tensions in this province²¹. In addition, it would appear that the lack of confidence in the political elite means that voters are less and less loyal to candidates who give them money or promise to facilitate access to improved services²².

Finally, the candidates all highlighted that their political commitment also has a significant non-monetary cost. Stress, anxiety and social isolation, sometimes even within the family unit, are experienced by seasoned politicians and political apprentices alike. Added to this is the increased risk to their physical and psychological integrity, particularly for women, who are more likely to be targets of harassment. Female candidates also complained of being stigmatised because of the negative perception of women politicians in the country. "In politics, women, we pay double", argued one candidate, who continued by saying that "it's more expensive to be a woman in politics: you have to fight twice over to deal with sexism and misogyny, prove yourself and constantly remind people of your qualifications".

Between elections

On the whole, MPs standing for re-election did not spend more on their election campaigns than the others, but thanks to their generous parliamentary income they worked to consolidate their electoral base throughout their term of office by means of what they call the "pre-campaign". Reflecting on his own term of office, a former MP admitted that "you get elected if you have money, and then you consolidate your networks".

In addition to the parliamentary reserve created especially for parliamentary holidays (amounting to around US\$3,000 - US\$3,500²³), the MPs surveyed set aside between a quarter and a half of their income for programmes and activities to support the residents of their constituency. This was either in the form of individual donations to meet specific and immediate needs, or indirectly in the form of community projects, such as building a school, purchasing medical equipment for health centres, repairing road infrastructure or buying generators.

Although these MPs say that they return to their constituencies between two and four times a year to find out about local issues, focus group participants estimated that only 3% return to their constituencies during their term of office, indicating that they have a fairly negative perception of their MPs' commitment to the community. In addition, experts interviewed said that the weakness of public services, which do not meet the basic needs of the Congolese people in terms of access to health, education and local infrastructure, as well as the low purchasing power of voters, contribute to this diversion of the role of MPs, who risk political suicide if they do not meet the demands of voters. As one elected candidate put it, "giving back to the electorate is crucial. If you don't give, you reduce your chances of being (re)elected".

These long-term investments, combined with the status they can help them acquire in the community, also work to consolidate the electoral base of the so-called "honourables" and constitute an additional advantage that raises the cost of political involvement for all contenders for the National Assembly before and during the election campaign. This is to the detriment of candidates who do not hold elected office and those of more modest means. In the words of one candidate, incumbents "who have the [financial] means become the unit of measurement for the others".

Mobilising funds

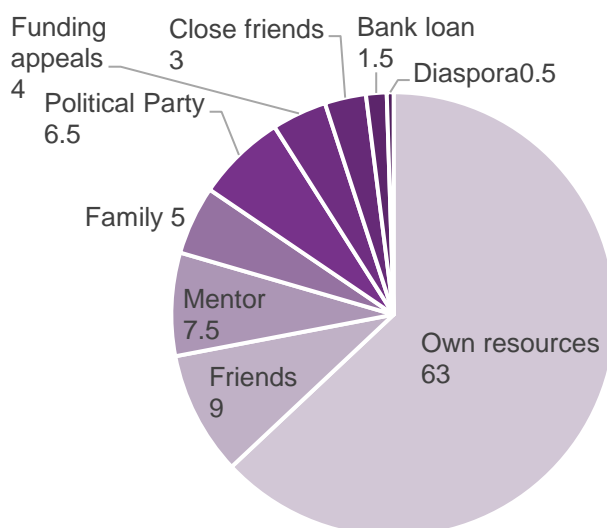


Figure 1: Source of candidates' campaign funds (average of 22 candidates surveyed, in %), 2023

With more than 25,000 aspirant legislators in 2023, the search for funding is naturally competitive. The candidates interviewed relied mainly on their personal savings for their campaign. The importance of individual start-up capital in the Congolese context reduces the chances for candidates from more modest backgrounds, which are often those from under-represented groups.

Ultimately, this start-up capital is seen as a symbol of success and of a candidate who has something to offer.

Personal savings were the most important part of a candidates budget according to 63% of respondents with support from friends (9%) and family (5%) the second and fourth most critical elements. There was little reliance on remittances from the Congolese diaspora, who many believe, are supported more by Congolese back home than the other way round. Candidates also often benefit from the support of a mentor (7.5%), who may be a political or religious figure, or from the media. While the support of mentors is financially more important than that of the family, it was less common among candidates surveyed. The role of Congolese businesses in political financing remains marginal.

High interest rates mean that the importance of bank loans in the make-up of candidates resources was just 6%. In addition to the risk of debt, the majority of candidates believe that they would not have obtained a loan agreement because banks do not finance political projects, which are perceived as too risky. As an alternative some had borrowed money from friends, with little or no interest.

Moreover, only a minority have taken the initiative to launch fundraising appeals. These appeals are generally frowned upon by Congolese voters, who generally consider that having money is a prerequisite for entering the electoral race: "It is criticised and frowned upon by the population, who consider that you can't run if you don't have money", suggested one candidate. Several candidates reported that anecdotes of candidates being vilified on the internet for asking voters for financial support had dissuaded them from doing the same.

Further, although political parties and groupings almost all paid the deposits of 1.6 million Congolese francs (approximately US\$573) each for the registration of candidacies, their participation in the financing of the election campaigns was marginal and unevenly distributed. Respondents said that they had received between US\$0 and US\$10,000 from their political party, and regretted the lack of transparency in the allocation of funds. The distribution depends on the candidate's estimated potential, which is often measured in terms of the social projects they have completed in their constituency and their status and seniority within the party. The distribution also often depends on family links with key figures within the political party, according to candidates interviewed for this study. Female candidates bemoaned the discrimination against women when it comes to parties distribution of funds claiming that more money is given to more men. One party president admitted that he had allocated funding to only 5% of his female candidates.

This further impacts women, who already have less economic power than men. Not only do they start the electoral race with less capital, but the party's financial support is also more meagre than that of their male opponents. For the majority of female candidates, as long as they do not occupy positions of responsibility within the parties, they will not be given priority when it comes to distributing funding. There are currently 920 officially registered political parties in the DRC, of which around 5% are led by women. The specific difficulties in accessing funding also have a

human cost for women candidates. It exposes them to a higher risk of sexual violence, even within their political grouping. Several admitted that they are more vulnerable to harassment from wealthy colleagues who may seek to take advantage of their lack of resources for sexual favours. One MP noted with gravity that women "prefer to work in the shadows" because politics "costs more for a woman; you have to be prepared to give your body away".

Drivers of the costs of politics

A voting system that individualises the cost of politics

To elect its national legislators, the DRC uses an open-list proportional preferential electoral system for constituencies with more than one seat. However giving voters the choice of voting for individuals within lists - and not just voting for a list - has two consequences: firstly, it increases the temptation for candidates to respond to the various demands of voters, and secondly, it puts the pressure of funding more on the candidates than on the political parties. As a domino effect, this pressure weighs more heavily on women, young people and candidates with disabilities²⁴.

Opacity and controversy over parliamentary remuneration

The government's lack of transparency regarding the salaries of MPs is fuelling voters distrust of the Congolese political elite. In September 2022, opposition politician Martin Fayulu sparked a heated debate about the remuneration of national MPs when he claimed in a press release that they had been earning the equivalent of US\$21,000 a month - including bonuses - since a pay rise at the beginning of 2022. This came as a shock to the public in one of the world's five poorest nations²⁵, who noted not only the frequent delays in their own salary payments but also the huge gap between MP salaries and those of civil servants, teachers and doctors.

Reflecting the opacity of MPs' incomes, this figure has been the subject of controversy since it is difficult to verify the total amount of remuneration and bonuses received under the various budget headings of the National Assembly. For their part, the majority of MPs either deny earning this sum, or claim to be unaware of the real amount of their total income. However a former MP, Delly Sesanga, acknowledged the accuracy of the rumoured figure in an interview in which he said he was in favour of greater transparency regarding MPs salaries.²⁶

According to the studies focus group participants, MPs earn too much for the work they do²⁷. Respondents across the board believed that 95% of candidates run to make a quick buck and that only 5% are committed to social development. In their opinion, the inflation in the number of candidates for political office seen in 2023 is directly linked to the media coverage of the US\$21,000 monthly salary. Candidates interviewed also noted that since the controversy, the expectations of voters has increased and that these demands have become increasingly difficult to bear, especially for candidates who do not already sit in the National Assembly. According to one

candidate, "campaigning is expensive, both symbolically and financially, because politics is the only sector that pays well. And so the public thinks that its voice has a cost since it realised how much MPs are paid. It's merit through money".

At the beginning of 2024, the rumour of a recent increase in the monthly salary to US\$33,000, confirmed by some and denied by others, rekindled the debate. In June, the president of the National Assembly, Vital Kamerhe, claimed that national MPs earn the equivalent of 14 million Congolese francs - around US\$5,300 – inclusive of all benefits. But opposition politician Martin Fayulu rejected this information and called for an investigation into the matter.²⁸

Underfunded political parties

Law 8/005 of 2008 sets out the conditions for public funding of political parties for their day-to-day activities and election campaigns²⁹. The law provides that parties are entitled to an annual contribution from the state for organisational purposes. This contribution must be proportional to the number of seats obtained in the various deliberative assemblies and its amount must be no less than 0.5% and no more than 1% of the state's annual revenue. For election campaigns, the amount of the state's contribution is set at 2% of the total national revenue accruing to the state. It is included in the Finance Act for the year following the organisation of each consultation. The text also provides for the establishment of an inter-institutional commission for the management and control of public funding of political parties.

However, these provisions have never been implemented, and the commission was never set up, depriving political parties of a degree of financial stability. Today, political parties survive mainly on the often symbolic contributions of their members, the irregular nature of which is a source of frustration for party executives. Party representatives and executives are sometimes called upon to provide financial support to the party's more modest members. But it is mainly party representatives holding elective or nominative office who contribute to party funds through a monthly deduction of 10% of their income; a system which favours the party in power. National MPs' ad hoc contributions to party federations, which amount to between \$1,000 and \$6,000 a year, also support their day-to-day activities while ensuring that the leader's local influence is maintained.

The non-application of the 2008 law is a missed opportunity for parties to make a substantial contribution to the funding of their candidates' election campaigns. It also contributes to weakening the competitiveness of opposition parties and therefore the country's democratic vitality. As far back as 2011, the European Union's election observation mission contended that persistent legal loopholes such as "the non-regulation of the financing of political parties and election campaigns" favoured the parties of the presidential majority, and recommended the drafting of a law on the financing of election campaigns³⁰. Implementation of the 2008 law would also have a beneficial effect on women's political participation, as the law includes provisions for parity in the eligibility criteria for public funding (article 3 paragraph 5).

Implications

Getting involved in politics is expensive in the Democratic Republic of Congo. What is known as "buying people's consciences", through individual and collective donations, is by far the biggest item of expenditure for Congolese politicians throughout the electoral cycle.

In a country where people's standard of living is particularly low, this "buying of consciences" distracts voters from real election issue elections, by relegating the importance of social projects put forward by candidates to second place. Focus group participants estimated that only 1-2% of those attending political rallies come to hear the candidates political agenda. "Gifts" are the main reason most prospective voters attend. For one elected representative, the proverb "a hungry stomach has no ears" illustrates the problem perfectly. This "buying of consciences" calls into question the accountability of elected representatives to their constituents, who can more easily decide, once elected, to act in their own interests. In the words of one candidate, "elected representatives do not feel accountable [because] they have already paid for their seats".

The majority of respondents also acknowledged that the high cost of politics is further eroding the inclusivity of Congolese democracy by skewing the representativeness of the National Assembly in favour of the better-off. In the words of one candidate, the principle of representative democracy is being replaced by a "democracy of the wealthy". A second candidate felt that the current system has created a "facade democracy, with the mediocre getting in thanks to their means [and] the competent not getting involved". "We are entrenching a parliament of the rich", said a third, concluding that "the costs of politics has destroyed democracy".

In this equation, high levels of parliamentary income contribute to raising the cost of politics overall. It undermines equality of opportunity between candidates by making MPs the only ones in a position to conduct "pre-campaigns" and sustain competitive campaigns throughout the electoral cycle. Not only that but the increases in MP salaries, argue opponents, creates and entrenches a culture of complacency and limited accountability, which in turn leads to a decline in the Assembly's control over government action³¹.

According to *Talatala*, the barometer of parliamentary activity and government control in DRC, only 12 MPs tabled oversight mechanisms or requests for information at the office of the National Assembly during the September 2022 ordinary session³². And very often, these initiatives are not followed up. *Talatala* concludes that, of the 26 oversight mechanisms or requests for information tabled during the March 2022 session, only five were actually examined by the lower house of the Congolese parliament³³. Sources reported that emoluments increased substantially after the end of the coalition between the *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS) and former president Joseph Kabila's *Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC) at the end of 2020, when it became necessary to consolidate a majority in parliament. For the same reasons, the alleged gift of 500 jeeps to the national MPs in June 2021 had already opened the debate on buying the loyalty of parliamentarians.

The rumoured increase in salaries is fuelling voter disillusionment with democracy and mistrust of the Congolese political class. Because of their weaker economic power, the most under-represented groups, including women, young people and people with disabilities, are penalised by the high cost of politics and the preponderance of "buying people's consciences", to the detriment of political projects³⁴. Only women and young people from families committed to politics can hope to have sufficient resources for the electoral battle, while others risk having to campaign for a running mate who has supported them. The high unemployment rate among young Congolese, combined with the long time it takes them to find their first job, weighs heavily on their ability to enter politics. Explaining that she had to fight to remain on her political party's list because of her young age, one candidate said that for young people, a political career comes at "an enormous cost if you are not the son of [because young people] have no work and cannot bear these costs". Focus group participants also argued that "the young people who succeed are the sons of". In a country where gender-based violence is widespread, women are at greater risk of sexual violence when entering politics is so expensive.

Finally, the high costs of politics are also likely to drive candidates who have invested heavily in their political careers to corruption, as the difficulty of accepting electoral defeat is commensurate with the investment made. For one interviewee, "the costs drive corruption because there is a fear of failure with such expenditure". Moreover, three candidates ironically concluded that, in the end, paying CENI directly to be elected would be a better investment than campaigning.

Recommendations

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, getting involved in politics, has a high cost according to the candidates interviewed for this study. To consolidate their electoral base before and during the campaign, they invest in direct and indirect donations to voters, whose expectations continue to grow with each electoral cycle. Money is not the only determinant of the vote, but unequal access to financial resources for aspiring MPs competing against MPs who have devoted a significant proportion of their salaries to building up a constituency base increases the cost for prospective aspirants. As a result, the democratic vitality of the country is undermined.

The following recommendations are proposed to resolve this problem:

- The legislature should bring national legislation into line with the DRC's international commitments by banning donations to voters and establishing a system of sanctions for those who transgress.
- The government and the legislature should be more transparent about the remuneration of MPs (including emoluments and bonuses), so as to increase the confidence of the Congolese people in their elected representatives and in the political class in general.

- The non-application of the 2008 law on the public funding of political parties is a missed opportunity for parties to make a substantial contribution to the funding of their candidates' election campaigns. It also weakens the competitiveness of opposition parties and therefore the country's democratic vitality. Revising and implementing this law would not only improve the stability of political parties and increase their competitiveness, but would also strengthen women's political participation thanks to the conditions of eligibility that require party lists to have equal numbers of women and men.
- The legislature should draw up a law to regulate the financing of election campaigns, including a ceiling on campaign expenditure with penalties for exceeding the ceiling, in order to balance electoral competition by ensuring that candidates with modest resources are not unfairly penalised. Once in place the spending cap would support the competitiveness of women, young and persons with disabilities candidates.
- The introduction of incentives to support women's political participation should be explored. These could include subsidies to facilitate their access to the media, training in mobilising donor networks, public speaking and tools for online campaigning on social media.
- The government and donors can support initiatives aimed at strengthening the political participation of young people, and in particular their ability to mobilise funds and donor networks.
- Support capacity-building programmes for MPs that civil society can run on their role and responsibilities in developing legislation and providing parliamentary oversight. As part of this, facilitate forums for dialogue on political issues between current and potential elected representatives and their constituents.
- Government, donors and civil society to design, implement and/or support national programmes to raise voter awareness of the harmful effects of "buying people's consciences".

References

- ¹ In September 2023, CENI stated that it had resorted to bank loans to compensate for these delays.
- ² The Westminster Foundation for Democracy has developed a comprehensive approach to politics that uses documentary research and interviews to understand the issues surrounding costs from the moment an individual decides to enter the game of parliamentary politics until the end of their mandate, if elected.
- ³ Joseph Kabila won the elections by 58% against Jean-Pierre Bemba (Mouvement de Libération du Congo).
- ⁴ Carter Center Electoral Expert Mission, Final Report, 2019.
- ⁵ Decision no. 001/CENI/AP/2024 of 05 January 2024.
- ⁶ Carter Center Election Observation Mission, Interim Report, January 26, 2024.
- ⁷ RFI. 2024. *RDC: Les résultats définitifs des législatives sont désormais connus*, 13 March. Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240313-rdc-les-resultats-definitifs-des-legislatives-sont-desormais-connus>
- ⁸ The Congolese National Assembly has 500 seats. However, following the cancellation of elections in two constituencies on the grounds of fraud, and the postponement of elections due to insecurity in three territories (Rutshuru, Masisi and Kwamouth), only 477 deputies were declared elected.
- ⁹ INEC decision n° 001/CENI/AP/2024 of 05 January 2024. New elections in these two constituencies are scheduled for 12 July 2024: INEC Decision n° 015/CENI/AP/2024 of 04 April 2024.
- ¹⁰ On 31 January 2024, CENI published the updated election timetable, according to which these three territories will vote on 5 October 2024.
- ¹¹ In three territories (Kwamouth, Masisi, Rutshuru) the elections were not organised because of the active presence of armed groups, namely the Mobondo militia in Mai-Ndombe Province and the M23 in North Kivu. On 31 January 2024, CENI published the updated election timetable, according to which these three territories will vote on 5 October 2024.
- ¹² Carter Center, Preliminary Statement of the International Election Observation Mission, 22 December 2023. Available on : Carter Center Preliminary Statement on the General Elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- ¹³ The election campaign period lasts one month
- ¹⁴ According to one candidate interviewed, "if we don't give money, we can be threatened and have stones thrown at us".
- ¹⁵ One candidate recounted how he chartered cars by plane to be able to criss-cross his constituency during the election campaign.
- ¹⁶ World Bank. 2023. <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/drc/overview> , 4 October.
- ¹⁷ Congolese Press Agency. 2024. "National Assembly: 71% newly elected MPs compared with 29% old MPs". Available at: www.acp.cd/nation/assemblee-nationale-71-de-deputes-nouvellement-elus-contre-29-danciens/
- ¹⁸ RFI. 2023. RDC : l'inflation, l'une des principales préoccupations des électeurs, 7 December. Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20231207-rdc-l-inflation-l-une-des-principales-preoccupations-des-electeurs>
- ¹⁹ Interview with Trésor Kibangula, Director of the political pillar of *Think Tank* Ebuteli, 14 February 2024.

- ²⁰ It should be noted that in the DRC, political parties are legally required to be "national in character and may not identify with a family, clan, tribe or ethnic group [...]". Law no. 04/002 of 2004, on the organisation and functioning of political parties. Available at: https://zoom-eco.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/11511_loi_du_15_mars_2004_partis_politiques.pdf
- ²¹ Ebuteli. 2024. "Katanga, la poudrière électorale", 12 March. Available at: www.admin.ebuteli.org/assets/21705bc0-af2d-4bc9-9d44-ea2c79cc043d
- ²² Interview with Trésor Kibangula, Director of the political pillar of *Think Tank* Ebuteli, 14 February 2024.
- ²³ This reserve was created during the 2018-2023 term of office. Members are also entitled to reimbursement of the cost of transport to and from their constituencies.
- ²⁴ Ballington, J. and Kahane, M. "Women in Politics: financing for political equality" in Falguera, E., Jones, S. and Ohman, M., *Funding of political parties and election campaigns*, International IDEA, 2014. Available at: www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/funding-of-political-parties-and-election-campaigns.pdf
- ²⁵ In October 2023, the World Bank estimated that around 62% of the country's population would be living on less than 2.15 dollars a day in 2022. World Bank, <https://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/drc/overview>, 4 October 2023.
- ²⁶ Actualités.cd, *Affaire 21 000 USD: après son audition, Delly Sesanga dit avoir fourni les preuves attestant ses allégations sur "l'ensemble des revenus perçus" par un député national*, 10 November 2022. Available at: <https://actualite.cd/2022/11/10/affaire-21-000-usd-apres-son-audition-delly-sesanga-dit-avoir-fourni-les-preuves>
- ²⁷ Focus group participants were in favour of parliamentarians being paid between \$3,500 and \$5,000.
- ²⁸ Actualités.cd, *Martin Fayulu denounces "untruths" about MPs' salaries, demands an investigation*, 15 June 2024. Available at <https://actualite.cd/2024/06/16/rdc-martin-fayulu-denonce-les-contre-verites-sur-les-salaires-des-deputes-exige-une#>
- ²⁹ Law no. 08/005 of 10 June 2008 on the public funding of political parties. Available at: <http://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20Public/Divers/L.08.005.10.06.2008.htm>
- ³⁰ European Union Election Observation Mission, Final Report, 2012. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/république-démocratique-du-congo-rapport-final-élections>
- ³¹ Interview with Valéry Madianga, Director of the Centre de Recherche en Finances Publiques et Développement Local (CREFDL), 17 February 2024. Interview with Florimond Muteba, Director of the Observatoire des dépenses publiques (ODEP), on 19 February 2024.
- ³² Matumo, Bienvenu, "Le contrôle parlementaire de nouveau gelé à l'Assemblée nationale?", *Talatala*, 18 November 2022. Available at: www.talatala.cd/eclairage/59/
- ³³ *Talatala*, "Rentrée parlementaire de septembre 2022 : il était comment le contrôle parlementaire de la session passée ?", 14 September 2022. Available at: www.talatala.cd/eclairage/53/
- ³⁴ For more on gender-related political finance issues, see: Cigane, L. and Ohman, M. 2014. *Political Finance and Gender Equality*, IFES White Paper, August. Available at: www.ifes.org/publications/political-finance-and-gender-equality

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. Operating internationally, WFD works with parliaments, political parties, and civil society groups as well as on elections to help make political systems fairer, more inclusive and accountable.

 www.wfd.org

 [@WFD_Democracy](https://twitter.com/WFD_Democracy)

 [@WFD_Democracy](https://www.instagram.com/WFD_Democracy)

 [**Westminster Foundation
for Democracy \(WFD\)**](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Westminster-Foundation-for-Democracy-(WFD))



Scan here to sign up to WFD news



Westminster Foundation for Democracy is an executive Non-departmental Public Body sponsored by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office