



Thematic Note 2
February 2023

Authors

Congo Research Group (CRG) and Ebuteli, its research partner in the DRC, with the *Bureau d'études, de recherche et de consulting international* (BERCI)

Majority of Congolese Reject East African Community Regional Force

A poll conducted in January 2023 by Congo Research Group (CRG), Ebuteli, and BERCI demonstrates that a majority of Congolese reject the East African Community's (EAC) solutions to the problem of insecurity in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This raises doubts about the acceptability of the EAC regional force, whose deployment began last August, and shows that the Congolese government is under strong nationalist pressure by the Congolese public in managing this crisis. This note is the second in a series of three analyzing the results of this survey.

The crisis of the March 23 Movement (M23) rebellion, which has expanded the territory under its control in North Kivu province throughout 2022, and even more rapidly since last October, has garnered much political and media attention in recent months.

Our latest poll, conducted in January 2023, reveals that the Congolese government is under strong popular pressure to resolve this crisis, while the EAC's current approach to resolve it is deeply unpopular.

First, the M23's demand to negotiate with the government, presumably for reintegration into the army, is rejected overwhelmingly: 82% of respondents *"do not believe"* that it would be *"acceptable for the government to negotiate with the M23 to end the conflict with this group."*

When asked about the best way to deal with Congolese armed groups, a small minority (11%) supported *"offering them positions in the army and the administration,"* well behind *"offering them spots in a demobilization program"* (47%) and *"disarming them by force"* (43%).

SUMMARY
The paradox of Congolese political opinion
Results of a national survey

With eleven months to go before the elections, how do Congolese perceive the state of their country and its institutions, the democratic process and the conflict in the East? This was the objective of the latest survey, conducted by the Congo Research Group (CRG), Ebuteli and BERCI in January 2023, by telephone among 3,842 people in the 26 provinces. The results will be published in three separate analyses on elections, security and governance.

Congolese public opinion seems to be trapped in a paradox: most Congolese are increasingly critical of the way their country is governed. Yet when asked for whom they would vote if elections were held next Sunday, a clear majority said it would be for the incumbent president, Felix Tshisekedi.

These trends are clear. In January 2023, only 39% of respondents said the country was headed in the right direction, compared to 61% in 2019, just after Tshisekedi came to power. While this figure is even higher than during the last years of Joseph Kabila's presidency—27% thought the country was going in the right direction in November 2017 and 19% in February 2018—it is still clear that the current government is struggling to meet its citizens' expectations.

These trends can also be seen in the drop in favorable opinions of Prime Minister Sama Lukonde and President Felix Tshisekedi. The percentage of people with a good opinion of Sama has dropped from 66% when he was appointed in 2021 to 29% today, while Tshisekedi has seen his rating drop from 62% in March 2019 to 36% now. Skepticism is evident in almost all aspects of public life. Forty percent of respondents believe that security in eastern Congo has not improved since the declaration of a state of siege in May 2021; 29% say it has become much worse. Sixty-five percent of respondents say the economy has deteriorated since Sama came to power almost two years ago, and 67% say the government is not effective in fighting corruption. The only area in which a plurality of respondents (66%) say the government has done a good job is education. This is probably the result of the introduction of free primary education, probably the biggest reform brought about by the Tshisekedi regime.

And yet, as our first analytical note shows, Tshisekedi would win the election by a clear margin: 50% of respondents who intend to vote say they will choose the incumbent, suggesting that even as a unified force, the opposition would have difficulty beating him. The runner-up would be Moïse Katumbi (17%), with Martin Fayulu in third place (10%). How is it possible that a population so critical of the president can still say they intend to re-elect him in such a resounding way? First, and probably the most sobering conclusion of the poll, a large portion of the population is simply going to stay away—nearly 54% of respondents say they don't intend to vote. But distrust of the opposition is also high. The percentage of people with a good opinion of its leaders is falling, in line with the president's decline: between March 2021 and January 2023, it fell from 46% to 33% for Martin Fayulu; for Moïse Katumbi, from 61% to 31%.

Politicians are not the only ones affected by this decline: 58% of respondents believe that civil society has not improved the governance of the country. Even Catholic Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo saw his popularity rating drop from 67% to 53% over the same period. For Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege—who some believe may run for office—his approval rating fell from 78% to 44%. International actors are not spared. As our second theme note in this series will show, a clear majority of Congolese reject military collaboration with the armies of the East African Community—between 64% and 78%, depending on the country. An overwhelming 67% want the UN peacekeeping mission (Monusco) to leave, a dramatic change from the 29% who held this view in October 2016.

Not a single one of the country's major donors can claim to have a clearly positive opinion today in Congo. This is a precipitous drop from the post-election period, when majorities of more than 75% had a good opinion of France, the United States, Belgium and the United Kingdom. The striking exceptions are China and Russia—the latter is now the most popular foreign country, with 61% favorable opinions, up from 35% in October 2016.

These trends are troubling. In the past, it was the civic engagement of Congolese that helped to push back authoritarianism, elite capture of the state and conflict. In the early 1990s, it was civil society that spearheaded the transition from one-party rule to democracy, mobilizing in the streets when elites blocked progress. This model was again followed during the massive protests that rocked the country between 2016 and 2018, in response to attempts to amend the constitution and rig the electoral process. And politicians, especially parliamentarians, have often paid the price for their poor performance by losing power at the ballot box.

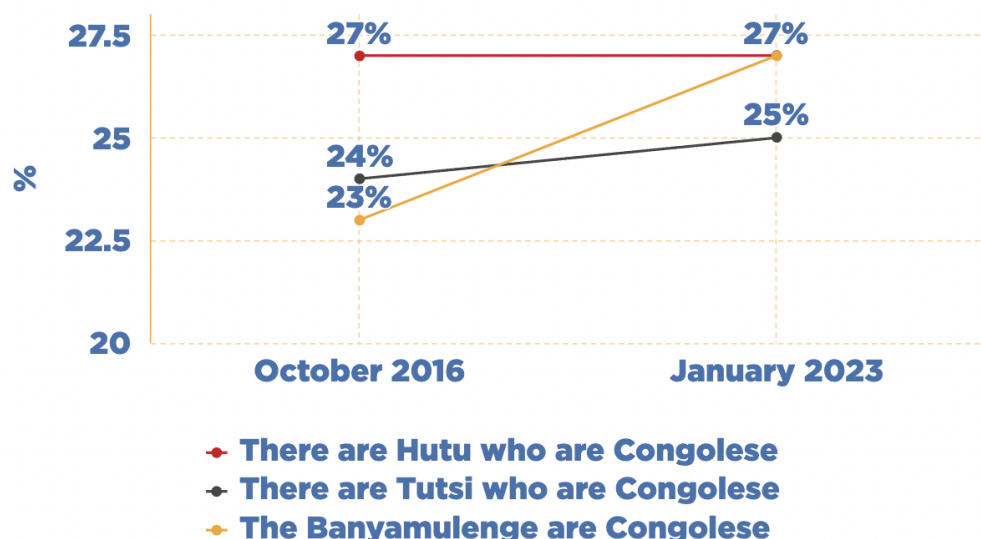
Today, however, even though Congolese overwhelmingly support democracy over any other model of government (77% in mid-2022), only 26% are satisfied with the functioning of their democracy—this is down from 62% immediately after the 2018 elections. Is civic engagement now on the decline? The upcoming elections will be a test in this regard. A growing number of Congolese—58%, much higher than in the past—believe their fate is in their own hands.

The Thorny Issue of Nationality

Nevertheless, it is uncertain that the M23 is seen as a Congolese armed group by a majority of those polled, given its support by the Rwandan government and the rejection of the Rwandophone communities that make up the majority of it. Indeed, despite the presence of Kinyarwanda speakers within the current territory of the DRC long before colonization, their membership as part of the Congolese nation is still questioned by a majority of respondents: only 25% agree with the statement that “*there are Tutsis who are Congolese*” and 27% say that “*there are Hutus who are Congolese*.” It can be noted that this rejection is not expressed in a very different way with regard to Tutsis than Hutu on a national scale – it also concerns the Banyamulenge (27% support the statement that they are Congolese), Alur (24%), and Hema (31%) communities.

This feeling of rejection has changed little, or even decreased, despite the M23 crisis: in 2016, very similar figures were recorded in response to these same questions. Despite the highly problematic nature of these opinions, these figures do not fit the narrative of an ongoing national mobilization for genocide against the Tutsi.

Agreement with the statement



Moreover, despite the fact that the M23 operates in North Kivu province, there is greater acceptance of these communities there than elsewhere: 40% of North Kivutians surveyed believe that *“there are Tutsi who are Congolese,”* 45% believe that *“there are Hutus who are Congolese,”* and a majority (54%) believe that *“the Banyamulenge are Congolese.”* This can be explained in part by the presence of a large Rwandophone community in this province.

Similarly, unlike the rest of the country, the majority of Ituri residents consider the *“Hema”* and *“Alur,”* two communities present in this province, to be Congolese.

This seems to point to a lack of information, or misinformation, which has a greater impact on populations who have no direct contact with these communities. There is, however, one exception to this trend: respondents in South Kivu are more likely than elsewhere to reject the idea that *“Hutu,” “Tutsi,”* and *“Banyamulenge”* are Congolese, despite the presence of the latter community in the province.

We also note that the majority of Congolese are hostile to *jus soli*, and therefore probably more convinced that nationality depends on community affiliation: 57% of respondents refute the idea that *“anyone whose family has lived in Congo since before 1960 is Congolese.”*

Strong Hostility to the Presence of Foreign Forces

There is also a great deal of mistrust in the regional processes underway to try to resolve insecurity in eastern DRC: 70% of respondents *“do not believe”* that discussions between *“the state and armed groups in Nairobi could bring peace to the east of the country,”* and 71% do not believe that *“discussions between the DRC and neighboring countries could bring peace to the east.”*

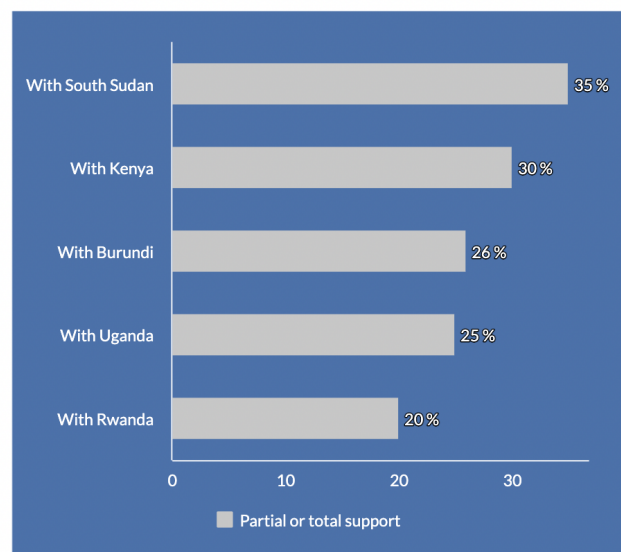
Similarly, the creation of an East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), which was first agreed in principle by the heads of state of the region in April 2022 to track down armed groups in eastern DRC, is rejected by a majority of Congolese: 69% of respondents *“do not believe”* that it will lead to the complete eradication of armed groups.

This is the case even for the Kenyan army, deployed in the M23’s area: 68% *“do not”* or *“do not at all”* support *“the pooling of forces between the DRC and Kenya.”*

Opposition to most of the other contingents in the force is even higher: 72% for Burundi, 73% for Uganda, and even 78% for Rwanda, which has been excluded from the force.

Only the rejection of the South Sudanese army is less pronounced than the others, although a majority (64% of respondents) are opposed to it.

To what degree do you support the pooling of the DRC’s armed forces with those of the EAC member countries?



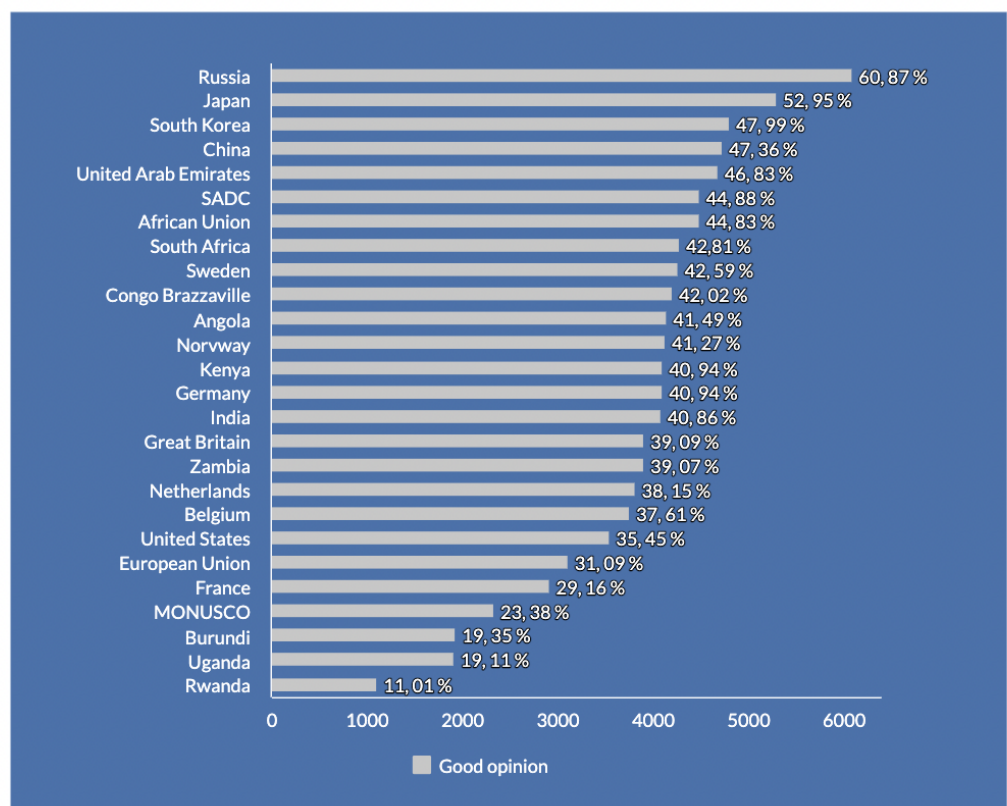
This rejection is higher in the provinces concerned. For example, the Ugandan contingent, which should be deployed in Ituri as part of the EACRF, and which is already present there with Operation Shujja, is less supported there than in general (23% in Ituri, compared to 25% nationally). The same phenomenon is observed for Burundi in South Kivu (13% support, compared to 26% nationally) or for South Sudan in the provinces of Haut and Bas Uélé (20% compared to 35% nationally).

The only exception to this trend is North Kivu, where respondents are less unfavorable to pooling with foreign armies than at the national level: 41% for Kenya and 33% for Uganda. Pooling with the Rwandan army would even be acceptable for 37% of respondents in this province. This difference could be explained by the greater integration of North Kivu into national and regional economic circuits. However, hostility to these foreign contingents remains in the majority.

In reality, it is the presence and record of foreign armies that are rejected, more than the countries in question. Kenya is a good example of this trend, since its image remains relatively good, on par with South Africa or Congo-Brazzaville, and much better than that of Uganda or Rwanda, although its military presence is not accepted by a majority.

We also note that the image of countries that have already sent troops to eastern Congo is deteriorating: 71% of respondents have a “bad” or “rather bad” opinion of Uganda (compared to 68% in April-June 2022) and 71% of respondents are now hostile to Burundi (compared to 60% previously).

Do you have a good or bad opinion of the following institutions /countries?

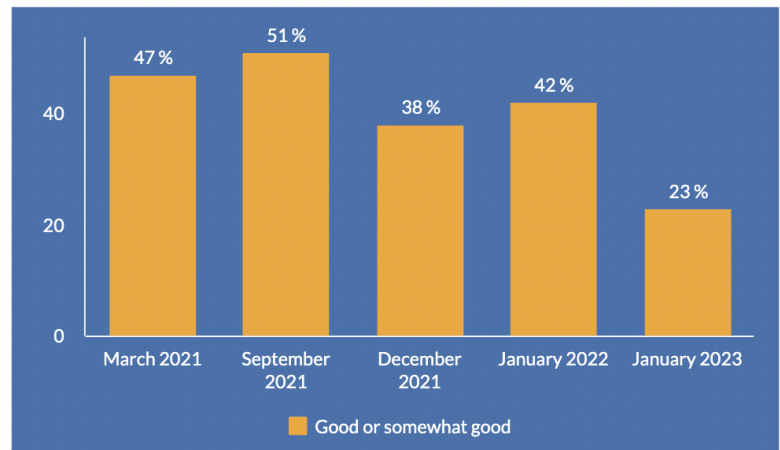


It can also be noted that Russia is the country with the best image among all those surveyed, despite its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It seems to have benefited from

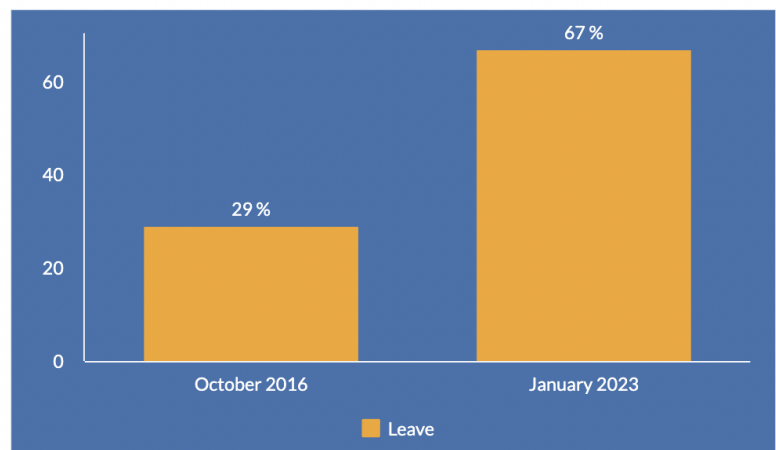
general anti-Western sentiment and the failure of the international community to resolve the M23 crisis.

Rejection of the UN Mission in the DRC is significant: 67% of respondents believe that it “does not contribute much and should leave,” and only 24% that it “does an important job and should stay.” The mission's popularity is also clearly declining: 67% of respondents have a “somewhat bad” or “bad” opinion of the mission, which is a record high since we began conducting these polls.

**Do you have a
good or bad
opinion of
MONUSCO?**



**Should
MONUSCO
leave,
downsize, or
stay ?**



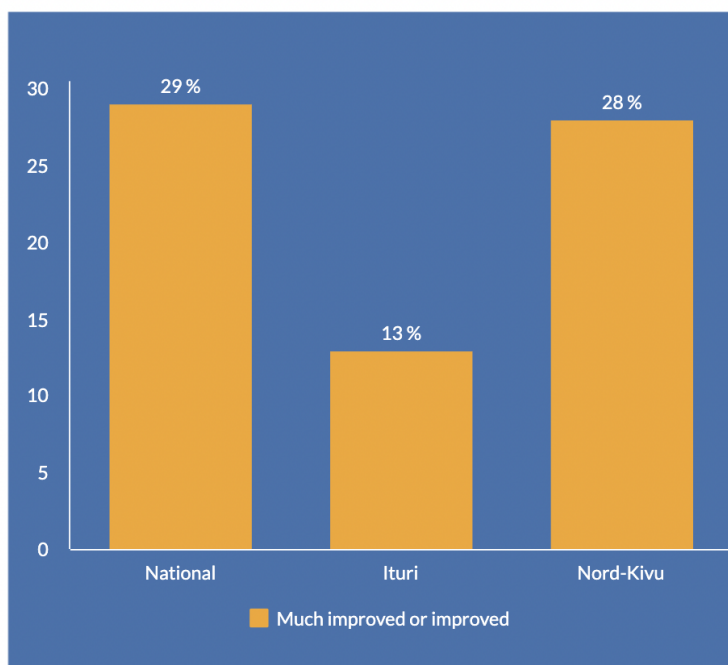
The desire to see the mission leave is even stronger in North Kivu (69%), one of its main headquarters, which corresponds to the hostile demonstrations against it, which are much more intense, frequent, and deadly than in other provinces.

Eastern Provinces' Distrust of the Government

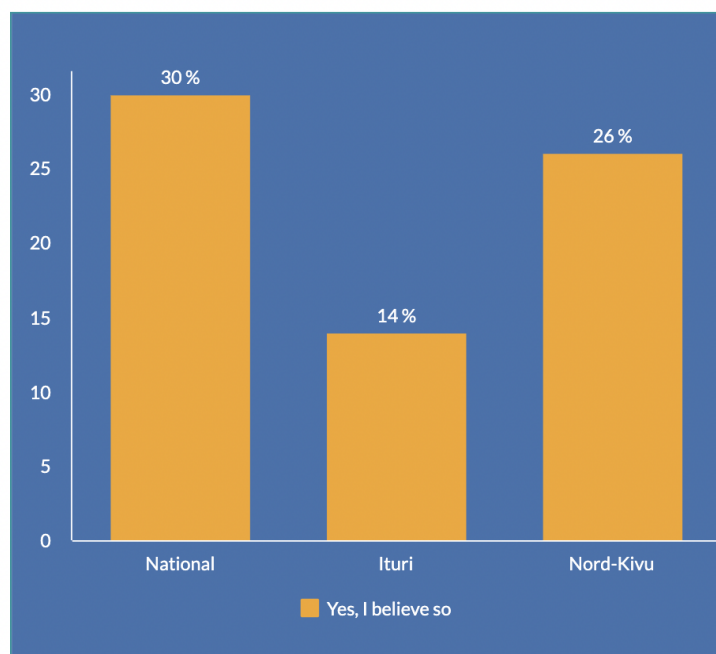
In terms of security, Congolese are slightly less hostile to national measures such as the state of siege, even though the majority of respondents increasingly consider this measure to be ineffective: 64% (+12 points) “do not believe” that this measure will completely eradicate the armed groups in eastern DRC, and only 29% of respondents believe that the security situation has improved overall since it was introduced (-1 point compared to April-June 2022).

The assessment is even more negative in the provinces directly affected by the state of siege, i.e., North Kivu and especially Ituri, where the inhabitants seem particularly hostile to this measure.

How has the security situation changed since the state of siege was imposed?



Do you believe that the establishment of state of siege by the president of the republic will lead to the total eradication of armed groups?



Similarly, 66% of those surveyed rated the performance of Sama Lukonde's government as "negative" or "totally negative" with regard to "insecurity in eastern DRC," and this feeling is even more negative in the provinces in conflict: 79% for South Kivu, 75% for Ituri, and 70% for North Kivu. This represents a challenge for the government, especially given the significant electoral weight of these provinces.

Few people in these provinces think that "*inter-community dialogues could solve the security problems affecting [their] community*": only 5% of Ituri residents surveyed think so, 4% of South Kivu residents, and 2% of North Kivu residents.

The idea of "*forcibly disarming*" "*Congolese armed groups*" is also less supported in South and North Kivu than elsewhere (24% and 34% respectively, compared to 43% nationally). Demobilization programs are seen as the best or least bad solution to this problem: 61% and 63% respectively, compared to 47% nationally.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted from January 14 to 17, 2023 to assess the four years of President Félix Tshisekedi's governance. The survey was conducted with a sample of 4,000 respondents, of which 3,632 were retained after complete cleaning of the file. The database used to draw this final sample came from the national directory compiled by BERCI during face-to-face surveys conducted in all 145 territories of the DRC, with a sample of 5,335 people. This national directory contains information on the geographic distribution and socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents: their social level, their level of education, their place of residence and their age, as well as their GPS coordinates. The random sampling technique was used to give all respondents an equal opportunity to participate in the survey and the quota method was used to ensure gender balance. The data collected were weighted according to the environment (urban/rural), gender, and geographic location of respondents so that the distribution would be as close as possible to the population estimates of the National Institute of Statistics (INS) and CENI, with a difference of at least one percent for geographic locations. After weighting the database, the results show no significant difference between the weighted and unweighted data. Fifty interviewers and six controllers trained in-house in Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) techniques were used to collect the information. The interviews took place mainly by telephone. The questionnaires were designed by repeating a series of questions asked in previous CRG-BERCI surveys, particularly those related to Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 of Félix Tshisekedi's rule, in order to allow for comparative analysis as much as possible.

All data was encoded on tablet computers and uploaded directly to a highly secure server hosted remotely by Ona.io. The individual information collected in this survey was kept confidential, and access to the server was limited by a very small number of people involved in the collection.

To learn more about the methodology (french only), [go to the CRG website](#).

About us

Congo Research Group (CRG) is an independent research center based at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University.

www.congoresearchgroup.org

Ebuteli is a Congolese research institute on politics, governance and violence, based in Kinshasa.
