

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY, SECURITY, AND POLITICAL REFORM IN THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Monday, August 14, 2023

MODERATOR

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FEATURED SPEAKER

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O'HANLON: Greetings, everyone around the country and around the world. I'm Michael O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution. And today we are here to have a Zoom session to discuss the prospects for political reform, security and prosperity in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country that I was privileged to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer in 40 years ago, and that has been making its way slowly and with difficulty into the democratic world of nations this century, now planning to hold what will be its fourth presidential election of the century under the 2006 constitution. That election is scheduled for December of this year, and President Tshisekedi is expected to be a candidate. We also are very privileged today to have with us the Honorable Martin Fayulu, who we also hope will be a candidate and has been and was believed by many to have won the presidential election, at least in vote count last time around and is planning to run this time. But we are here not as an organization to have a campaign rally, of course, but to really foster a dialogue and discussion as to what Congo's main needs are, what policies may serve its people best, and also may strengthen its democracy in this important and fateful upcoming season, culminating we expect in December elections.

So the way we will proceed today is that I will have a conversation for about a half hour informed partly by your questions that have already been received and any that come in to events at Brookings. Dot edu. Again, that's events at Brookings dot edu. You may send additional questions that way, but the Honorable Mr. Fayulu and I will talk for about a half hour, at which point I will then bring in a panel that I'll introduce at that time, but just to preview, it will include Jason Stearns. Fred Bauma. And Mvemba Dirolele from CSIS and Stephanie Wolters from the South Africa Institute for International Affairs and I will introduce all of them. We're privileged to have them from all over the world joining us on Zoom. And that's the purpose, of course, that this conversation is on Zoom. Mr. Fayulu is in Kinshasa, and that's where he was born. He served in a distinguished career in the private sector in ExxonMobil jobs for a number of decades, finally culminating in leading Exxon's efforts in Ethiopia. He became a member of parliament under the 21st century constitution of the DRC and has served again in that distinguished body, as well as being the candidate that led the opposition and received, by most observers believe, about 60%, 62% of the vote tally last time around. So, Mr. Fayulu, welcome to Brookings. Thank you very much for joining us. We are honored to have you, sir, and I look forward very much to our conversation. Over to you for a word of greeting, if you like.

FAYULU: Yeah, thank you, thank you very much. Thank you everybody, for being here, participating in this session. I'm I'm happy to be here. I'm happy to talk about Congo. Congo is a vast land is a country with 110 million inhabitants today, but it's a country that everybody has almost forgotten. And I really want Congo to be on the loop. Congo, because Congo has many things to offer to the world. Thank you very much. Thank you for inviting me.

O'HANLON: Thank you, sir. So if I could, I'd like to begin right away with I know an issue that's been so central to your concern and which strikes me as a fairly nonpartisan issue, because it has to do with empowering the Congolese people to vote. And I know that you have been very concerned about developing an accurate vote tally, a registration process, and giving every Congolese citizen of appropriate age the opportunity to register for the vote. That's been a contentious issue in previous elections. How is it going? As we sit here on August 14th, only about four months before the election is meant to be held, How do you feel about the preparation process so far?

FAYULU: The preparation is in chaos, really chaos. Because what you have to know that Mr. Tshisekedi didn't win the last election and he put in place a system for him to now, you know, game the election. And now we arrive at the time of voter registration. We promoted that exercise. We told everybody to go and register themselves as the voters. But the electoral commission has run a process without any transparency. And we in our team, a team called Lamukua, we put in place a coordination to follow up everything that CENI was doing, and we come up with the situation that the electoral file is a totally false. And then we said, we thought as everybody, civil society and some other, you know, runners, we thought, okay, now we need an external audit so the external audit can assess if the electoral file is correct or not. And the electoral commission

said no way. And he took five friend of the president to run the audit for five days and they come up with a report which is totally false and no consistency, nothing there, no weaknesses, no fault, you know, strength, and the recommendation to strengthen the file. That's what we are saying today. In 2018, we had the electoral file with more than 10 million fake voters. And then this time around they push to have a semi-electronic voters - votes. And with that semi-electronic votes, they prepared themselves also to have fake voters so they can send the results through the electronic system. And then Mr. Tshisekedi with those fake voters prepared and he will win. This is the simplest way for him to win the election. Then we said, okay, it looks like we are accompanying Mr. Tshisekedi and for him to win the election. And we said, okay, stop. Let us call for an independent. But that CENI doesn't want. The Catholic Church and the Protestant church, they came two weeks ago. They said the same, Please, we cannot go with a electoral register that nobody knows what is in there. And the CENI said no. That's why we, myself and my team and some others, Congolese political parties, we are saying if it's to go and accompany Tshisekedi, why are you doing that? We'll continue to have a illegitimate president in this country.

O'HANLON: Thank you very much. I should also clarify for our viewers that we did invite the office of President Tshisekedi to be part of this conversation today, and most specifically, the Congolese ambassador to the United States. We understand that she may not have felt that she was available or able to make this event. And we certainly mean no ill intent, but we did try to make this ecumenical and hope that we can in the future. In fact, President Tshisekedi, before he was president, was scheduled to be part of a Brookings event in 2018. A visa issue precluded that. But then he came and visited me at Brookings privately in that same season prior to the election of 2018. So again, we do and will continue to try to represent a broad range of Congolese voices. But I know, Mr. Fayulu, that your voice represents a wide range of Congolese already because you were indeed the consensus opposition candidate in 2018 through a wide group of parties and, as noted, received a very hefty percentage of that vote by anybody's reckoning. And so if I could ask you just one follow-up question about this independent commission. And I'm not an expert on elections, but I have observed elections in Afghanistan and studied, to some extent, the efforts to build democracies elsewhere. I wonder if you could say a bit more about what kind of a commission with what kind of representation would satisfy your concerns and in your judgment, really help push along this registration process correctly.

FAYULU: Look, the first thing is this. The electoral commission today is comprised only with Tshisekedi's people. Tshisekedi has put in place a coalition called Union - Sacred Union for the Nation, and he has the 15 people in that electoral commission are members of a "sacred union." And we said, no way, it's not impartial. We continue to say that that commission should be changed. And if they keep the president, because he belongs to the churches, if the churches said they don't have any issue with him, we also don't have an issue. But what about the other members that should belong to other stakeholders? We want that to happen. Secondly, when they started the electoral process, they called for the bid, the bid to buy machines, to buy kits for the registration, and they think it was really, really not transparent. And then when they bought those machines, we said that, okay, now give us the number of machines you bought, the number of cards you printed and where you send them so we can see and then go and make control. How many you still have in stock? We can reconcile all those figures to see what is going on. The CENI, the electoral commission say no way. But when they started the process, we found that two car accidents in the back countries and the two car accidents, they found the machine. They found papers. They found, you know, electoral card. And the CENI issue a statement saying that, okay, we take that issue to the justice and we let you know what happened. And till today, nothing. That's, CENI didn't communicate anything. Then we said to CENI, we had the meeting on the June 30th, myself and the two other candidates and the president of CENI. We said, okay, you are going ahead. Continue. Let us at this stage, you will continue the activities that you put in your calendars. But in this same time, let us call for the external audit. And the if the external audit comes and says that, OK, everything is OK, we continue and then we, my coalition, Lamukua, we will file our document. But if the file is not okay according to the the audit, then we reshuffle everything. Then we would stop. The guy said, okay, I have to go and ask my colleague and then I'll come back to you. But my auditors, they have told me that I have to publish the list. By publishing the list, you

can see what is going on. We told him that publishing the list is the must, is already in the law. You should do that. You should have even do that before the the interim list. You should have done that. You didn't do that. But today, publishing the list cannot replace the external audit. That's not where we are. And I don't know if somebody really today can say that participating in the election, it doesn't know the number of voters, the quality of voters, and then they tell him, that's okay. When you vote, the machine will transfer the result to the sample server and then they will proclaim the result. If at all you have this discrepancy with the number from the electronic vote and the number for the manual counting, then you have to go to the center, and that center, CENI will issue the process. And then you sign the paper and then then you contest later on. How can someone agree on that process? That's where we stand. And we say, no, we we have told the Congolese we cannot have elections in this country if we don't have a clean electoral fight.

O'HANLON: Thank you for the explanation. It's much appreciated. And now, if I could, I'd like to turn to the policy agenda facing your country and the kinds of ideas that you think should be debated among the candidates. Obviously, you need a fair process and a fair vote as a prerequisite to any kind of meaningful democratic election. And so I understand why you focus so much on the voter registration and transparency and accountability questions. But I'd like to hear a little bit about your vision for the country and the kinds of issues you think that the candidates in general should be discussing and debating and trying to implement it once there's a winner and once there's a parliament also chosen by the voters. And I guess, you know, one natural place to start is the economy, because maybe that can even give us a little bit of good news in a conversation that will have a number of tough spots. I know a lot of our panelists will talk about the violence in the east. There are other concerns with governance in Congo today. But the good news, apart from just the heart and spirit of the Congolese people that you and I know so well and admire so much is that the GDP growth rate in Congo has actually been quite good for a couple of years. Now this does not reach everyone equally. Part of it's driven by mineral exploitation that's not always done fairly and not always done legally. But I would still like to have your thoughts, sir, on how you feel the Congolese economy is doing right now and how it can do even better in the future. If you don't mind addressing that question, please.

FAYULU: Yeah, the Congolese economy is doing really bad and people are starving. We have poverty in this country everywhere. More than 80% of Congolese are unemployed and we import what we are eating. And we have minerals. When you talk about the GDP growth, all this go because of the minerals. Okay. And but the money coming in the country has been going to the pocket of those who are running the country. We had some program. We had a program called called 100 Days program of 560 million U.S. dollars. And the money disappeared. Nobody knows exactly when the money went. We had the program, another program called [inaudible]. [Inaudible] is in the Luba language, okay? And that [inaudible] program of 130 million U.S. dollars. Today, nobody has seen any concrete realization in on the ground. We had a theft. Mr. Kamerhe, who was the you know, chief of staff of Mr. Tshisekedi, and he was involved in the \$57 million that disappeared. And that 57 million, Mr. Kamerhe was jailed. He was in jail for almost two years, but now he is out without reimbursing money to the country, but now is has been appointed as minister of the economy. We had another 15 million from the petroleum side. And today, when Mr. Tshisekedi come up to power and the dollars, \$1 was 1000, just a round figure, 1700 Congolese francs. And today \$1 is 2400 plus Congolese francs. You know, more than 50%, okay, that money lost as the value. And today, Congolese, we need more -- sorry, 27 million of Congolese need humanitarian assistance. 27 million, you know, and then we don't have money and we cannot organize anything. And the economy is you know, people cannot find the way to to to live the good life because the few money coming in is really go for enrichment, illicit enrichment, not the economy. And today, nobody can tell you [inaudible] in Kinshasa. Kinshasa has 17, 17 million people because everybody in the back country, they try to come in the Kinshasa and to fund how to have a better life. And then you have insecurity. You have, you know, so many young guys who trying to commit, really, fraud and theft in the, in the city.

O'HANLON: Well, yes, it's a difficult message to hear, but thank you for the clear explanation of how you see the economic challenges. I thought I would turn briefly now to the east

and the ongoing difficulty, instability and violence there, as well as the role of various foreign or even transnational actors, whether it's ISIS or another group. And I had really two questions about the east and the stability of DRC more generally. One is, could you just help the general audience here, including myself, understand where we are in 2023 compared to previous decades? Are things about the same in the east? Are they getting worse? Are they getting a little better? I know they're still bad. There's still a lot of violence, a lot of insecurity and a real lack of development. And I know people like Stephanie Wolters and Jason Stearns and others on the panel will discuss this and have done a lot of field research in that area. But I'm sure you have views as well. So could you help us understand where things are, but also what the current, what the current options are, what needs to happen to make the east safer? We still have a U.N. mission in Congo, but it's been there a long time, it's not clear if it's making any real progress. It's not clear if the Congolese military is getting more capable and more able to control the east. It's not clear if foreign actors are becoming more or less dangerous. So how do you see today compared to previous years and what needs to happen next?

FAYULU: The situation is the worst and it is getting worse and worse. You should know that Mr. Tshisekedi came to power with the complicity of Mr. Kagame, they were close friends and that they made a deal, the three of them, Mr. Kabila, Kagame, and Tshisekedi, because Kagame found that if Fayulu run the country and he will really address issues that the Congo is facing. Meaning that we will try to stop the war in the eastern part of Congo and then we will try to have a good cooperation between countries, neighboring countries to fund how to alleviate poverty in all countries and to boost to build democracy in the country. And today, even yesterday, one of locality in Rutshuru has been taken, the locality by the name of Busanza that has been taken by the M23. As you know, that the M23, we had it in 2012, but the Congolese forces that the army forces fought and push out the M23. And now suddenly the M23 came back last year. And we really don't know how this happened. It was when Tshisekedi and Kagame they were too close, very close and signed some deals and even signed a deal that the Congo has to join the Eastern African community. And I don't know why Tshisekedi push Congo to eastern African community and today many the North Kivu and parts of North Kivu is out of control of the government. You if you go to Ituri and part of Ituri is out of the Congo government, Congolese authority. And then what Tshisekedi did almost two years now, more than two years, he put in place what he called a state of siege and where the military is running the country, is running the two provinces without any major, you know, improvement. But but what do we add, decrees, people, they continue to kill people. And even today, Mr. Tshisekedi, has find, has call for a meeting to find how to get rid of state of siege and I don't know, because in his agenda, some people are saying that you want to change the Constitution, but the National Assembly or the Congress cannot change it if we are under state of siege. I don't know if it's true, but this is the remold that's going on here. The situation is the east is just cold or worsen because of the relationship that Tshisekedi had with Mr. Kagame. And he signed many deeds and he brought M23, which are really Rwanda's army and are in our country, and it looks like now they made a kind of agreement they have to separate, to distance themselves, to tell Congolese that they are not agreeing to have them. But for me, I think it's again.

O'HANLON: Thank you. So I have two more questions and then I wil thank you very much for helping us today to understand the issues facing Congo and bring in our panel. One question is going to be a follow up on the east, and then I'm going to ask you about China and its role, because as you know, for Americans and for many others, watching, China's role in Africa has become a very important issue of broader concern and could be good and bad for Congo, could be good and bad for U.S.-China relations. So I want to finish on that. But first, if I could follow up with your discussion of security in the east, sir. And what I heard you explain just now was that in your in your judgment, a lot of the difficulty and danger and violence comes from the role of Rwanda and a role that perhaps the current president of Congo has not found a way to discourage and perhaps has even become complicit. I wonder, is is your agenda for eastern Congo primarily about getting tougher on foreign actors, maybe Rwanda in particular, or do you have other aspects of your policy agenda that you would want to explain to us today? For example, does the U.N. force need to get better or bigger for a while, even though it's been there for a long time? Does the

Congolese military need a different kind of technical assistance from the outside world for a certain period as it tries to improve its own capacity for operating in those very remote areas of the east? Is there anything else you would want to add to the agenda?

FAYULU: Yeah, to the agenda as a solution to end the violence in the war in the east, first of all, the international community has to find a solution for those guys, for the FDLR, because Mr. Kagame is taking his cues to, you know, come to Congo with his forces because he's saying that is the pursuing the FDLR. The international community as to first of all, to let us know how many of those guys there are. 1000? 2000? 1000, 2000? Or how many? And then if they can take the FDLR, send them away from Congo, another country on the Europe or Australia? I don't know. This is, I think, the first thing to do. The second thing is to change the mission of the Monusco. The Monusco has to have a robust mission like we had in 1960, when we get our, we got our independence. We had a mission, called Mission des Nations Unies au Congo. UN Mission in Congo. But that mission, had, you know, mandate to fight. We need a mission, a robust mission they can fight and to bring peace. We need a mission to bring peace in the Congo and to push away all those guys who want a part of Congo. And also we need something like a Congo and Rwanda, Burundi or neighboring country has to sit down together and to find a way. How can they collaborate? How can have a peace in the region? We need that, instead of Mr. Kagame going in some African country saying that he want to request some land in in the Congo. The solution on that, we are not part of those guys who are saying that's a UN mission or Monusco should leave the country. Monusco leaving the country today, it would be a disaster because will not have any eyes to see what is going on there. We need to change the mandate of Monusco. That's that's I think what we should do for Monusco and for the U.N. And also the European country or the U.N. countries, all of them, many the European, the American, even the African country, each country should condemn Rwanda for what is doing. And I see that the secretary-general issue during the last, you know, report he issued, is not talking about any involvement of Rwanda with the M23. I find it strange. But why the expense? I've said that Rwanda is involved, Rwanda is backing the M23. Content is sent. This is the lack of diplomacy of Congo, and Mr. Kagame has gained confidence in the world. But what is important for the world to have Congo with a hundred million habitants, 2.3 million square kilometers with all resources we have with the forest, water and, you know, cobalt and so on. And but all you want is a small country of 13 million and disturbing the whole world. We wish to have, really, we have to make a choice. But we are not saying that Rwanda should be expelled. We are not saying that Rwanda should be forgotten. We are saying we need the peace in the region by starting with peace in Congo, having the real election in the Congo, the transparent election, because the problem of Congo is that illegitimacy of the people ruling the country by not being competent, because Mr. Tshisekedi, as everybody knows, he doesn't, is not capable, is not capable to run the country with that importance that the country has. That's that's really something that the world should look at.

O'HANLON: So thank you. Let me ask one final question. And of course, we could talk about this all day, but I'm really just looking for a fairly brief assessment from your point of view about China's role in Congo today. It's quite considerable. I wonder if you see it as mostly good, mostly worrying? If you see the U.S.-China and European-China rivalries as potentially harmful to Congo, or are these competitions potentially healthy by giving Kinshasa options for different foreign investors or other kinds of missions, other kinds of technical assistance efforts? So if you could help us just in a nutshell, understand that role of China in Congo today, please.

FAYULU: Yeah, I'm wondering with that those that competition between China, U.S., even Russia, because that competition will come later so let the democratic country to say, oh, let's forget about what is going on and if Tshisekedi rig the election and he won it because he may go and offer himself to China or Russia. We, you, the U.S., France, Germany, U.K., Senegal and the other countries in the world, they are teaming up with other countries. The relationship has to go with everybody. We are in one world today. We should have relationship with everybody. But the first thing is we should have democracy. The first thing we should have: transparency. The first thing is we, the money of the country, should go to the [inaudible] project to really alleviate the poverty of Congolese and for their welfare. But we cannot team up with the countries just because

we have to team up and no transparency, no real interest for the Congo. We should have the win-win, you know, partnership. And the country should win. Congo also should win. What I recommend that we should look at the relation that is profitable for Congo. Congo needs everybody. But Congo needs a relationship that will help these people. And to go ahead in terms of human being, in terms of, how do you call it, the violation of human rights? Okay, that's what I want to say. The human rights should be focused and nobody can come and do a relationship with Congo, whereas the government is violating human rights of Congo. We need all this. The rule of law should prevail. And democracy, you know, pillar should prevail so we can go ahead and help our country. We have many resources. We have 110 million people and we have people with competencies and we can run our country. We need everybody, Indians, Chinese, American, European. And that's for a good game. And no a forced game.

O'HANLON: Thank you very much. Sir, we've been privileged to have you. I understand you may stay on and perhaps we'll give you the floor one last time as we conclude in about an hour. But I'm now going to bring in the broader panel. So we're going to do a little swap of of television cameras, as Mr. Fayulu says goodbye for the moment and turns his camera off. Everyone else can please turn their camera on. Unfortunately, in the audience, you'll be stuck with me either way, so that part's not going to change. But I'd now like to begin introducing the panelists. And again, thank you very much, everyone, for joining us today. I see up on my upper left Jeopardy box Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, a good friend of mine, a longstanding scholar within Washington, but also a man of remarkable accomplishment as a journalist, as a Congolese, as a person who deployed with peacekeepers and covered their work some years ago. He's been an election observer, worked for various organizations like the Foreign Service Institute and the International Republican Institute. He teaches at SAIS in Washington, and that's where Stephanie Wolters got her degree in Africa studies. She also is an experienced journalist and now resides in South Africa, where she's part of the South Africa Institute for International Affairs and also is a consultant with Okapo and has done work for the newspaper industry in Africa, the BBC covered Congo itself, and also is currently working on a research project that looks at the interaction of the various countries in eastern Congo that we just heard Mr. Fayulu talk about. So we'll look forward to her insights. Jason Stearns is at Simon Fraser University in Canada. He also, along with Fred Bauma, whom I'll introduce in a moment, is affiliated with New York University and the Center Center for International Cooperation, where they've also developed the Congo Research Group over the years. Jason is a very experienced and diligent field researcher, also a very accomplished author with a particular flair for some of the best titles in the history of writing on Africa. "Dancing in the Glory of Monsters" was his book of some years ago, and more recently, a book called "La guerre qui ne dit pas son nom" - "The War That Doesn't Say Its Name" - really talking about the ongoing violence in eastern Congo and how it's a conflict that the world can easily forget but really should not, and that continues to do such devastation to the country. And finally, Fred Bauma, who is a remarkable Congolese himself based in New York now, but has been imprisoned for his efforts to promote human rights and democracy in Congo during a previous regime and survived even under a death sentence for 18 months in prison, has emerged as a, again, remarkable researcher. He and Jason together also wrote a blog which brings together voices from across Africa about social and political change and activism. And we're really delighted to have him with us as well today.

So if I could just say to the panel, thank you. A real treat to have you here And the way we're going to proceed in the 50 minutes we have left is I'm just going to ask two simple questions and ask each person to respond in turn. And the first question is going to be to set the stage, to tell us in three or 4 minutes what you consider the most important current realities about Congo to understand today. And of course, I'm hoping that there'll be some diversity of the subjects you cover and we'll get a little bit of a lay of the land on politics, economics, security, perhaps the U.S.-China and NATO-China competitions to the extent that's relevant. But whatever you see as the most important scene-setter that perhaps journalists or even Congo watchers don't fully understand or appreciate. And then a second question really is going to be an open-ended question about the most important policy agenda for Congo going forward, including what needs to happen to make these elections successful, but then building on that to also help enhance Congo's

future prosperity and stability. So by previous understanding and agreement, Mvemba, if I could, I'm going to begin with you and ask you to help us understand Congo today. Again, thanks to everyone and over to the panel. And you're still on mute, my friend.

DIZOLELE: Thank you very much, Mike, for inviting us. It's a pleasure to join you and the rest of my co-panelists. The the DRC is yet again at a crossroad, an important one, but the DRC has been at this crossroad for the last long time. Those of us who followed the election closely, it's always a sense of *deja vu*. 2006, some people boycott the election. Some people get out of the process. The civil society then is left to become the arbiter and push this process forward. We saw that again in 2011. Similar thing. There's always a bit of saber rattling, a little bit of boycott, a little bit of all this. So every time, every cycle, 2018, you know, we saw really it was supposed to be 2016, civil society, get involved and save the day as President Kabila was trying to extend his time in office. There was hope there in 2016, but thankfully, it was primarily due to the push of civil society and the activist group and advocacy group. Politicians in Congo in many ways have been a disappointment because they create what I've come to call, and many of us call, Congo fatigue. Every five years, the movie starts again. Different twists. Same characters. Same actors. And then we expect a different result. This time we have literally the same issue. We have president of the electoral commission, which comes with a lot of credibility, having worked for EISA and so on. But then we had the president, who came with a lot of credibility last time, Corneille Nangaa, and eventually, nothing seemed to fall exactly in place. This is due in part because of the system itself. The system itself, whereby people are sent to the parliament, they do not necessarily represent the people they will sent them there. And this creates a Congo fatigue inside Congo, where we find ourselves today. We're not sure if people will show up to vote because even though we say 40,000 -- 45 million people have been registered, we've heard Mr. Martin Fayulu talk about the opposition. So on one side, we have the usual, we have the incumbent who has the power, who's consolidating his power. We know President Tshisekedi appoint a new government, which some of us call the electoral government. It's a government that represents heavyweights from different parts of the country that will help deliver the election victory to him, hopefully the way they see it in December. We have reports of people who don't want to participate. And that, of course, is not going to change much, unfortunately, because the train is on track for the incumbent and the incumbent is benefiting for everything that any incumbent benefit from anywhere in the world. They have the gravitas, they have the momentum, they have a legacy. They can show, they have accomplishments they can tell people, whether people agree or not, and then, of course, they have access to state coffers. In terms of the economy, it is problematic now because we hear a lot, Mike just mentioned GDP growth rate and so forth and stuff. I think that's IMF speak, World Bank speak. If you ask the average person sitting in [inaudible], in Kamina, in Basankusu, if they've seen any change in their daily lives, there's no change. In fact, it's gotten worse. The rate of the dollar, inflation and so on, that is not translating in everyday life.

When it comes to the spirit of the election itself, it's also very tense, not just because of the conflict in the east, but the psychosis of arrests. The psychosis caused as recently by the gunning down of an MP, Cherubin Okende, and also a former minister. So that sends a message that creates a certain discomfort in the country. I will end with the side of the opposition in the peace in the east. The opposition, once again, is absolutely divided. We saw a coalition trying to form but don't really take any shape and the end people cannot really aligned themselves behind the opposition because it's really fragmented. In terms of peace, I think here we are reaping the consequences of lack of creativity between Kampala, Kigali, and Kinshasa. Deals have happened over the last decade, but it's always individual deals. It's Kabila and Kagame, Kabila and Museveni. It's so-and-so. There's a new process. Now, you know, president, Martin Fayulu, Mr. Fayulu talked about all these deals. It's very individualized and eventually get this ping-pong. Rwanda blames Congo. Congo blames Uganda. Uganda blames Congo and so on. We lack institutional peace. In other words, you cannot make peace between individuals. You make peace between countries. It got to be beyond President Kagame. It got to be beyond President Kabila, beyond President Tshisekedi. So we've seen a set of processes take place that are very opaque. We see deals they get announced, handshakes, high fives and so on. It doesn't change anything on the ground. So deeply I have this event. It's more than time for Kigali, for Kinshasa to have peace like peace

everywhere else. You have delegation that meets, hammer out the differences and set up the course. So I'll pause there and we can continue.

O'HANLON: That's great. You've also set up my second question about policy agenda going forward, so I'll turn to that in a moment. But please, Fred, over to you. Welcome. It's a privilege to have you with us, and I look forward to hearing your assessment about how things are in Congo today with whatever subject or issue you'd like to emphasize most, please.

BAUMA: Thank you very much, Michael, and good to see all of my fellows here. I think in terms of where the DRC is now, it's fair to start with the electoral process, because this is the fourth electoral cycle since the end of the war, since the peace agreement 20 years ago. And that peace agreement came with a lot of promises of change, democracy, end of legitimacy crises. And what we've seen so far is four electoral cycles where on every cycle, the quality of the electoral process is becoming worse and worse to the point where, as Mr. Fayulu mentioned in 2018, we don't even know when like who will win the result other than the leaks from CENI and the Catholic Church. And this election tend to be, seems to be in the same way. We don't -- there's a big question on the voter register. I think it's a matter of the the different stakeholders want to be, to have guarantees that the, given the way they are constituted and given many instruments, including some unidentified registry incentives, they would like to see an audit and there is no audit. And CENI have been actually clear that it will not undergo any additional audit. So, and this is this is coming after a series of failed reforms since the last election on the electoral process. So on the, on on democracy, I think, and the electoral processes, we can say that's where the country is is on the eve of a fourth electoral process, which will only demonstrate, I believe, that the level of democracy is, the democracy is going, is going down in general. And this is not only due to the quality of of the technical organization of the electoral process is also in terms of political participation in this process, which we do, we had polling last year and and this year I believe, and what you are seeing, the trend we are seeing, polling is that the people who are saying they are willing to go to vote in the election, which would be organized the next Sunday, are going down more and more. As an example, in 2018, there were almost 90% of people who were willing to go to vote if there were elections to be organized and this year there were around less than 50% who were willing to go to vote. And this is something we see constantly, we've been seeing constantly since the beginning and the level of trust in institutions, in all institutions is going down, also. The CENI, the office of the president, the government, the parliament, and so on. So that is one thing where we are today.

Where we are also is that the the security situation in the east, and I think Jason and Stephanie will come back to this, is getting worse in terms of the number, the number of armed groups, in terms of the number of IDPs, in terms of displaced people, actually, we have more internally displaced people today than at any time in the past and even their highest time of of conflict. And maybe in terms of where the country is also is is we are experiencing the highest level of inequality in DRC. There is, as opposed to a growth in terms of GDP, I think if you see where the country was twenty years ago and today we consider that there was a lot of change. The budget was some hundreds of million, and now I think the official figures rose to more than 10 billion. But in terms of the reality of an average Congolese, I think things haven't changed significantly. One example of this is, is that the salaries of MPs, member of Parliament in Kinshasa have went from one, like 1500s during the transition of Parliament. So this is 23, 26 to more than \$20,000 today. What is the salary of a schoolteacher? Didn't change that much. It didn't, it didn't double. So this is a country where you have a lot of resources. You have the production of copper, the production of cobalt increasing significantly. And the people who are benefiting from these are companies or politicians in Kinshasa. The rest of the country doesn't have much. So, to end, to finish here, I think election and democracy should be a priority for, in this, in this space. But other than that, if people want to see more and more concrete and sound policies on the security and foreign policy and also policies to reduce inequality in the country.

O'HANLON: Yes. And we'll come back to that in the second round. Thank you. That was a very good framing, Jason. Thank you for joining. And over to you, my friend.

STEARNS: Thanks, Mike. Good to see all my friends and colleagues. Good to see Mr. Fayulu here. Thank you very much. I think my job here is to talk a little bit about the east and to try to link this. And I think there's obvious connections to the electoral situation in Kinshasa. As Fred and Mr. Fayulu have pointed out, the security situation in the east has gotten worse. Today, there are 6.2 million IDPs. That is close to the high point of IDPs in Congolese history, at least according to what we've tracked or what the U.N. has tracked. So that's that's almost twice as many IDPs as there were in the Congo at the height of the great Congo War. And yet we're in a post-conflict situation. And so that shows you a little bit the paradox that we're in. People are treating the conflict in the East, largely speaking, as a technical problem. There is no broad speaking, there's no broad political approach. There is no real peace process with regards to the east. And yet 6.2 million people -- that is the entire number of people who live in the province where I live in British Columbia -- are displaced in the DRC. There is one armed group that's that is making the headlines. That's the M23 rebellion, for good reasons. It is since its resurgence in November of 2021, it has threatened the regional capital of Goma. It is an armed group with extensive backing by neighboring countries, in particular the Rwandan government. And so therefore, obviously it makes headlines. It is the primary source of or the primary focus for the Congolese government in terms of security in the east. Congo's government has a tendency to say security in the east is being driven by this problem. And so therefore, you know, that's there's a justified focus on the M23 and on the complicity and support of neighboring countries. And yet it is only one of over 100 armed groups. The IDP figure I gave you of 6.2 million only I think about 10% of those IDPs can be attributed to the M23 rebellion. The rest are other armed groups. It is not the deadliest armed group. That title goes to the ADF, an Islamist group of or Ugandan origin, as well as the CODECO, which is the militia in the Ituri province. And so this is a real fractal, fragmented situation in the east with not one particular string one can pull to disentangle this cat's cradle of violence.

The one, so two points I like to make with regards to the east. With regards to the M23, as Mr. Fayulu has pointed out, as Fred alluded to, you can't tackle the M23 crisis without tackling the regional problems. This is a geopolitical problem. The M23 crisis began through geopolitical competition between Uganda and Rwanda in the east. It is part of Uganda, and Rwanda's both efforts to maintain influence and control over the eastern Congo for a variety of reasons, including economic reasons. They drive enormous benefit from instability in the eastern Congo. The top export of both Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi at the moment is gold, and most of that gold comes from the eastern DRC. About half of Rwanda's exports, I think last year were, consisted of gold from the DRC. And so you can see, you can see the regional economic concern with regards to the M23. In a response to this, the international community, and this is the perversity of the situation, the community still funds an enormous amount of Rwanda's expenses and expenditures. They're very close to the Ugandan government as well. They fund a large part of Burundi's expenditures as well. And yet that international community has not only done very little, aside from condemn the support. It has gone for it to hold important international meetings. So the Commonwealth Head of Head of State Summit was held last year in Kigali, a whole host of other summits were held in Kigali. Paul Kagame continues to travel internationally and be feted internationally, including by the United Nations, for, you know, for good reason. They've done amazing things and other things, and yet it seems to be impossible to walk and chew gum at the same time for most international diplomats. And so, I think there is an international complicity with regard to that situation and much, much more that can be done by international diplomats with regards to solving the geopolitical concerns of that question.

But getting back to the large security issue, which is not just M23, the common denominator is the Congolese state. And this is where it connects to the elections. The Congolese state since Joseph Kabila, since Mobutu has treated the security services largely not as a source of, not as a means to provide a public good, security, but has seen the security services as a threat and so therefore has ruled and managed the security services through fragmentation and through patronage, deploying them far away from the capital to keep them away from coups as we've seen elsewhere in Africa. And so a majority of the security services are deployed a thousand miles from Kinshasa in the east, where they allow them to enrich themselves on various racketeering and

patronage opportunities. And so this benefits, obviously, the security services. It benefits the political elites in Kinshasa, but it is to the huge detriment of the Congolese population, because instead of securing the population, they're actually often extorting and abusing the population and they're allowing the security vacuum to flourish. And so this is one of the reasons you have these 100 armed groups emerge in the eastern DRC. So the only way you can deal with the situation in terms of the long term, setting aside the M23 and that that that proximate problem in the long term is with through greater accountability and transparency.

At the moment, politicians are not punished for inaction on security in the eastern DRC. And this despite the enormous upswelling of democratic fervor in the country. We saw this, and I think this is the this is the important bright spot in the silver lining of democracy in the Congo that we do need to put on the table in this conversation, which is traditionally the Congolese people have been extremely active in holding and trying to prevent, and trying to get democracy. We saw this in 2016 when Congolese people rose up to prevent Joseph Kabila from getting a third term in office. He is the only president in this region who has been prevented from changing the constitution to do that because of the Congolese people preventing him to do that. Hugely courageous actions by them to prevent that from happening. He then tried to impose his own candidate in the 2018 elections. He was unable to do so. He ended up striking a deal with the runner-up to the detriment of Mr. Fayulu, who's on this call. So obviously the elections were not completely free and fair, and yet Joseph Kabila was thwarted in what he wanted to happen. And so democracy has a way of bubbling up from below in in the DRC. And so I think that diplomats, as well as the Congolese political elites, have not been able to capitalize on that upswelling, on that grassroots momentum for democracy in the DRC. That is what's needed, I think, in terms of security sector reform. That, for me is where the hope lies in regards to the security sector, security reforms in the east. I don't believe that Monusco, I don't believe that international diplomats in the long term will be able to to bring about the the impetus for accountability necessary; that will come from the Congolese people. But we can do a lot in order to be able to provide provide the circumstances in which they can, in which they can hold their own leaders accountable. And we have failed to do so in 2018. We actually were complicit in this arrangement that provided the presidency to Felix Tshisekedi. The US government was very active in facilitating that. And so I think that hopefully will be the international community, including the United States government, will call a spade a spade this time around and actually try to promote accountability with regards to the electoral process, not just in the presidency, but also in parliament. So I'll stop there, and eager to hear the question and answer period.

O'HANLON: That's fantastic. Thank you. And Stephanie, I thank you for batting clean-up for us and for your patience and for all your great work in the region with Okapi, as well as the South African Institute for International Affairs. I should have mentioned earlier, you're working on a book on regional players in the east. And I should have mentioned that Mvemba is writing a book about President Mobutu. So a lot of good books in addition to Jason's represented on this panel. But let me turn the floor to you. Love to hear your assessment of how things are in DRC with whatever angle you'd like to emphasize. You're still on mute.

WOLTERS: Sorry about that. Thank you very much, Mike, and good to see everybody on the panel today. And thank you very much to Brookings for organizing this event. I wanted to start with, I'm going to stick in the east and stick with some of the peace and security issues, because I think that we're in a moment right now where we have some opportunities that unfortunately, I think, both from a regional approach and from an international approach, were unfortunately missing to try and make a dent into some of the things that Jason has just described. And one of the one of the biggest concerns I think we should be having is that Tshisekedi himself is kind of running the response to the way in which things are going in the east and in particular to the M23 crisis as a presidential candidate who's campaigning for the presidency. And what that means is that he's using it in many ways as a diversion from some of the more important issues which have been raised by Mvemba and by Fred and by Jason in terms of the political and governance challenges specific to the elections, but also what we should be looking forward to in the DRC. And he's taking a very populist line on on this particular crisis. And of course, one of the one of the big

concerns around that is that there's a lot of anti-Rwanda foreign sentiment throughout the country. And that is the kind of thing that Tshisekedi has not done enough, in my view, to try to end. But it also means the fact that he's playing this as a presidential candidate also means that he limits many of his options. This has now become the kind of issue that is noticed quite heavily in Kinshasa. Events in the east used to be the kind of thing that was, you know, talked about amongst a certain circle in Kinshasa, but it wasn't something that everybody had an opinion on. I think that's changed quite dramatically now. And I think perhaps Fred can tell us more about that. But today, in other parts of the DRC, what's happening in the east is very much on everybody's lips and there's a very kind of hostile attitude towards Rwanda. There's a hostile attitude to particular ethnic groups. And there's a very, there's almost like an intense need for some kind of real pushback from Kinshasa. And all of that is caught up in these elections and the way in which Tshisekedi has spoken about it and has approached this. I think that we know that there's been there have been a flurry of regional efforts. And the reason why I think it's important to talk about those is because those are opportunities. M23 by no means, as Jason has said very clearly, is the only game in town, but it's currently sucking up most of the international attention and most of the international energy and even regional resources in terms of approaches to to to how to try and end that.

And so it's an opportunity, I think, for us to really think about what the region needs to do to try and put an end to some of the the the recurring drivers of violence in eastern DRC. Unfortunately, I think that both the East African Community and SADC, who isn't yet on the ground but is meant to be very soon, the East African Community are taking some of the, are following in the footsteps of previous interventions and not looking at the bigger picture. So the East African Community, which Congo only joined in March 2022, very much pushed by Uhuru Kenyatta who was then still the president and who was very close to Tshisekedi, has taken a two-track approach to to the to the conflict with the M23. One is to send in a regional military force, EACRF, and the other is to mediate something called the Nairobi political talks, Uhuru Kenyatta's mediating those, between armed groups from eastern DRC. Now, the Nairobi talks, there have been now four rounds, I think, if I'm not mistaken, are talks, which have been from the start, the objective of those those talks have been unclear. There have only been a certain number of armed groups that have participated. The M23 was kicked out early on, which meant that they were not at the table to discuss. They have a whole separate set of demands and don't want to be part of Nairobi at this point. But they were, they were kicked out early on because of movements along the frontline. But I think the Nairobi talks are something that at the moment are very much out of sync with realities on the ground where we're seeing as a result of the M23, fighting coalitions and alliances of four of armed groups that are now galvanizing some of the conflict in the east. And so to try and impose a DDR process and a mediation process that are kind of at odds with what the reality is may not be so effective. So I'm not sure that the Nairobi approach is the one that is the best timed at the moment. When it comes to the East African Community's military approach, I mean, much can be said about this. One of the problems I think from the get-go has been that, of course Uganda and Burundi in particular have never been neutral players in eastern DRC, yet they are part of the East African force. And so that's something that we should we should think, think hard about. The other big contributors, troop contributing countries are Kenya and South Sudan. And we've we've seen really a situation on the ground where, from the East African Community being seen as, kind of a, not so much a savior, but a helpful force, very quickly, that relationship turning sour. Both local opposition in eastern DRC and North Kivu, in particular to the East African Community Force, and then some very undiplomatic, I would say, things said by key members of Tshisekedi's government about how the East African force wasn't efficient, was simply creating buffer zones and wasn't doing what Tshisekedi wanted it to do, which was to go after the M23. Now the East African Community pushes back and says, that was never our mandate. We were never going to be aggressive and chased the M23 away. And that has become a key sticking point between the two and a very publicly played out diplomatic spat between a regional, regional community that has just committed troops and resources into DRC and that is now being essentially pushed away by that very same government that had invited it in. So that's that's obviously an issue of of great concern. There is now, the at the end of the EAC mandate is coming in the next few weeks and we'll see whether it does get renewed. But as these tensions were building, Tshisekedi very quickly turned

to a former ally who he had forgotten about for many years, and that was SADC. And so SADC, the Southern African Development Community, which, the last time that there was an M23 crisis, sent in troops from Tanzania, Malawi, and and South Africa as part of the Force Intervention Brigade has now decided to send in also a military force into eastern DRC. Now, we don't know many of the details, but this is meant to be happening very soon. There have been delays apparently in the logistics, and we don't even know who the troop contributing countries are. But obviously, this is another purely military approach to a problem that in many ways has no no clear military solution. On top of that, we're going to have the East African community forces potentially still on the ground. We have Monusco forces on the ground. We have the Congolese army and now potentially also a SADC army. I mean, this is a lot of armies to have in a small place with no real coordination, no clarity on who will be in command of any of this, what the lines of communication will even be. So adding, I think, a lot of complications to the situation in the eastern DRC.

Finally, the Luanda process, which is being led by João Lourenço, the president of Angola, is meant to be the political process that I think we need to widen to a much wider, much bigger set of players so include Uganda and Burundi. And that's something that is really there to try and keep Paul Kagame and Tshisekedi speaking about this particular crisis. But it hasn't really moved the needle on that in any substantive way, and so we're kind of stuck there as well. It has come up with the Luanda roadmap, which is still the kind of a framework for the modalities of M23 cantonment and so on and so forth. But that is really something that has faded very much, unfortunately, into the background in the last few months as no real progress has been made. So in a nutshell, we have a lot of military approaches, few political approaches. Those that we do have are maybe ill-timed and others aren't fully inclusive to, I think, address some of the big drivers of the conflict that we do have. And it's an opportunity; a lot of resources are going to go into the East African force. The SADC force is meant to cost \$550 million just for one year. So are these the right, is this the right thing to be spending money on when we could be widening a conversation and perhaps addressing it differently? That's the question I want to end on. Thank you.

O'HANLON: Thank you very much. And we have good news and bad news about where we are in the panel discussion. The bad news is we only have about 20 minutes left. The good news is you all have covered so many of the issues that I think it sets us up for a punchy final round in which everyone can please feel the liberty to drive home a specific policy idea, proposal or agenda item that you probably have already touched upon. But now I'm going to go in reverse order, if I could, starting with Stephanie and Jason, stay in the east for a minute and then come back to Fred and Mvemba, and give Mr. Fayulu a chance for any brief final thoughts as well. But Stephanie, given the context that you just described that you and Jason and the rest of the panel have just described, what could possibly be a promising path forward? I mean, I'm also haunted by Jason's explanation of the economic incentives for certain actors, certain countries to see this thing continue and to see the chaos continue. Mr. Fayulu talked about a much stronger U.N. mission with a different mandate and a more assertive mandate as perhaps a way to organize all these disparate elements. I wondered if you had a preferred course of action that you think really has any kind of a realistic chance in the term of the next presidential election in Congo.

WOLTERS: Well, I mean, I think that we, yeah, I mean, I think that we we need to be starting to speak about this regional conversation quite seriously. And I think it's very clear that there are huge numbers of interests in keeping instability in the in the eastern DRC going. Who bears the consequences for that? You know, the consequences are disproportionately borne by Congolese citizens and by the Congolese population. And so how much longer do we want that to go on for? Yes, there are there are issues on the Congolese side that need to absolutely be addressed and that go to the heart of how power works in the DRC, including what Jason described earlier about the Congolese army and the patronage networks and the kind of outsourcing of of those types of issues and the breakdown of governance. Absolutely, those need to be discussed internally. And that brings us back to elections, which is why we need a credible government that is willing to tackle some of these issues and can do the difficult things that inevitably dismantling those patronage networks within the Congolese army will, will, will mean. But

we have to have a conversation at a regional level about what, what's driving Rwanda's interest, what's driving Uganda's and Uganda's interest. And we can't do some of that if we don't also have the international community pushing that. I mean, we know that the EU sanctioned one Rwandan defense force officer recently for his role in eastern Congo. I mean, I think that that just isn't enough. I don't know how many times we have to keep going through variations of what we're going through now, where we have U.N. reports that state very clearly what's at play here, and then we don't have consequences. And so inevitably, that's that's part part of what has to happen. The political will has to come from the region. But there has to be a there has to be there has to be consensus, I think, in the international community that we can't continue to treat this as a national conflict only because we do still do that far too often. So I'll leave it there. Thank you.

O'HANLON: Thank you. And, Jason, if I could go to you for any thoughts you've got, but also I'd like to hear, if you don't mind, your suggestions for how Washington and other Western capitals can do better this time than they did last time. Since you were pretty compelling in your critique of the way the 2018 situation was handled. So love to hear your best suggestions going forward. Thank you.

STEARNS: Well, I don't disagree with anything that Stephanie just said. Unsurprisingly, I think that we do need a combination of a strong process and pressure to make this process work. So it is a process as well as some sticks and carrots to make the process work. At the moment, we don't, as Stephanie pointed out, the Nairobi process is sort of dysfunctional. The Luanda process is as well. Dysfunctional, I think largely because there's not enough leadership. The Kenyan leadership has fizzled out largely at the, parties at the table have vastly different approaches, worldviews as well as interests at the table. And so there's just nothing. It's a process that's stuck. I do think that I agree here with what Stephanie is saying, that we need to have more international pressure, especially on Rwanda and Uganda, especially Rwanda, to get this thing unstuck. I mean, this is the playbook. This is the third time that we've had a resurgence of the or an appearance of the M23, if you include its predecessor, the CNDP. In 2008, the CNDP was solved through a deal through international pressure and a deal between Rwanda and the Congo that saw the CNDP integrate into the Congolese army and some of its leaders arrested. In 2013, again, international pressure led to a deal where Rwanda pulled the plug on the M23. It collapsed and went into exile. And so I think, again, there needs to be that the solution to this problem has to come through pressure on Rwanda and some sort of deal. That deal is going to have to also include the Congolese government, right. There's going to need to be people coming together. But I think for people to come together, an impetus has to be pressure on the Rwandan government.

Now, why haven't we seen that? And what are people in Washington telling me? I speak often with people in the White House and the national security establishment, in the foreign policy establishment in Washington, D.C., as well as elsewhere. One problem is, is that the US actually in this case, they were, they came out most forcefully amongst donor countries, and since around mid-last year, mid 2022, they were forcefully condemning Rwanda support to the M23, going so far in more recent declarations to say that the Rwandan government doesn't need to just end support to the M23, but they need to withdraw their troops from the eastern DRC. The State Department sees actually a large part of the fighting happening by Rwandan troops in eastern DRC. That's much more forceful earlier than other countries. I think that's good. Problem is, it wasn't backed up by anything tangible, anything material or anything concrete. One of the reasons for this, according to the State Department, I think they're right, is is that there just is a complete divergence between the U.S., the French, and the UK. The UK hasn't even condemned. The UK, in fact is being embarked on this very questionable asylum deal with the Rwandan government, which sees all asylum applicants to the UK deported, or many of them at least are - this has been blocked in courts but were supposed to be - deported to Rwanda and instead of getting asylum in the UK, they would get asylum in Rwanda. This is a deal that's extremely questionable, but it's bound the UK government together with their own government. The French have other interests. Macron sees part of his legacy as reestablishing relations with through on a government. He doesn't want to jeopardize that. The French and Rwandans have obviously, going back to the genocide, very, very fraught relationship and he's reestablished that. He visited Kigali, he apologized for the

French role in the genocide, and he doesn't want to jeopardize that. Over and beyond that, the French have interest, the largest French company in terms of revenues in the world, TotalEnergies, is being protected in northern Mozambique by the Rwandan army that's deployed there against Islamist movement in northern Mozambique. And the Rwandans have leveraged their their export of of their own in army as peacekeepers, as security security providers across Africa. And this is something that not only charms the French, they are currently embarked, beginning to embark in Benin, in northern Benin. They're active in the Central African Republic, both as peacekeepers as well as a bilateral force in the Central African Republic and in Mozambique. So increasingly, the Rwandans are projecting their military force and this, of course, is a counterbalance to Wagner. And people in the Defense Department in the U.S. recognize this and say that. And so whereas you have some people in the State Department pushing and putting pressure on Rwanda, you have other people in the U.S. security establishment actually quite appreciative of what Rwanda can do in terms of a counterweight to Wagner in C.A.R., but potentially also elsewhere in Africa. And so this is why there hasn't been, I think, and this is what people in Washington tell me is they'll, and I think many of them are quite frustrated, is that they'll be speaking up and saying we need to do more. Some of them talking about actually going more being more forceful about sanctions. In 2013, around \$300 million in aid was suspended from Rwanda. That made them act. You don't have a similar sort of thing. So I would agree with Stephanie that that needs there needs to be an impetus there. And the burden to assert to large extent is on the people who are spending hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Rwanda at a time when Rwanda's invading a neighboring country. So I would just I would just put that there.

In terms of the other question, I'll try to be very brief in terms of what can be done on on elections. I'm not optimistic with regards to this cycle for a variety of reasons. The entire electoral apparatus is politicized, the electoral, as Mr. Fayulu and others have pointed out, as Fred has pointed out, the electoral commission is politicized. The the judiciary is deeply politicized. And that's also due to Tshisekedi. Civil society is deeply divided and politicized, where civil society came together as one and made a coalition with the opposition against Kabila standing for another term in 2018. In this case, opposition is divided and civil society is divided. And I think that that as well is a big problem. So I'm not I'm not optimistic. We should say also that Tshisekedi in our polling is quite popular. So I think that that as well as his control of the electoral apparatus, gives him a huge upper hand in these in these coming in these coming elections.

So I think the important thing here is, as I said before, just to be to be frank and not let our geopolitical concerns override the more important concerns, I think, regarding democracy. There is a huge push in Washington at the moment to see everything in the Congo through the lens of geopolitical rivalry with China. I don't think it's beneficial to anybody, certainly not to the Congolese people. And so I don't think that we should let that override the need to speak out, to see things as they are, to fund the important civil society organizations that are working on democracy in in the DRC, and to continue a much more, I think, aggressive and forthright diplomacy on these issues. You know, with regards to the M23 as the election, what we can see is that there is just no drive in the international community for visionary diplomacy in the Great Lakes and that, especially in Africa and the African context, the African Union has, I think, been extremely weak on this crisis. That's allowed sort of what Stephanie described as the fizzling out of the political process, but that's also backed by by the U.S.. You know, in the past when we've seen political processes work, we saw this with Russ Feingold as a special envoy of the U.S. government in 2012, 2013. We saw this during the great wars of Congo to 1996 to 2003 with much more, I think visionary leadership by by the U.S. government that eventually overcame some of these entrenched interests that I'm describing. I think we need a resurgence of that today in Washington as well as elsewhere.

O'HANLON: Thank you very, very much. Fred, over to you to drive home whatever point you think is most crucial at this juncture.

BAUMA: Well, I have many things to say and just a few minutes, but if I may start by democracy itself, and I would like to say that there's a crisis of democracy everywhere. In this election, DRC, I think we should see it's not only as an isolated process, but as a process that is

going wrong, as in many other countries in the continent. And this is important in this particular moment when we see the resurgence of coups in Western Africa and when people see more and more military coups, but we should not forget that when people tend to support those coups, especially young people, is also because they don't see an election alternative. Actually electoral coups, which almost in many African countries tend to be supported by dissent countries that are criticizing the military coup. This happened in DRC at least in 2011 and in 2018 and probably will likely happen in coming months. So as we are going through the electoral process, I think we should recognize that the weak or nontransparent and the regulatory process not only is bad for DRC, but it is so bad for its to some extent or to the democratic dynamic in the African continent. And maybe it may be beneficial for everybody that we have a real democratic election. And I think we have less and less chance to see that happening in December this year. But still, we should all be measuring the risks that we are facing as a country and as a continent.

Other than that, I would say most of the time the electoral process is, like the, because of the quality of the election, most of the debates in the last 20 years, I would say are around the quality of the process rather than on the policy proposals that is to be discussed during this electoral process. And we saw this in this electoral process, it is very less discussion on what kind of security policy, what kind of economic policy, what kind of foreign policy to propose, and all is, all these debates are captured by is this going to be free and fair elections? So as long as we have not free and not fair elections, somehow the substance, the substance of the democracy is also being undermined. Maybe to finish with a couple of points. One is that. They I think on on, on on security in the east, there is both Congo fatigue and also there is a high level of of international community fatigue from Congolese people, on how the donors are trying to not to resolve the deep roots of the conflicts or to address them or even to to touch them, but to stabilize a certain level of instability. And this was the discourse in 2018, after the election. The argument that I was in from Paris to New York to Washington, D.C., was that this consensus or that deal was good for stability in the east. What we had is, is growing instability. And I think those kind of arguments not only may be may have a higher degree of racism, but they they came from the idea that we as Congolese people, we are not able to resolve our own problem, although sometimes in the end they are very against the popular mobilization that is happening. As a consequence, people are tired of many aspects of the international community, all the weight has been on the intervention in the east. Part of the mobilization against Monusco we've been seeing since 2019 at least is due to the that feeling of Monusco being a strong presence of international community, but also a weak presence in the way to address long-time roots of the conflict, but also on the responsibility of the Congolese government. So I think it's for many people and for the majority, I think if you ask Congolese people who like Monusco to go not only because they think it is ineffective in addressing security concerns, but because we need to have a government that is more responsible in its mandate to take care of security of its citizens. And we need to see more of the security sector reform, the army to be a key to the condition of the military to be improved. We need to see a police, a national police that we can trust. We need to know that the security forces that we can we can trust, we need to have a coherent foreign policy. And we should stop, Congolese government should stop to externalize its response to security concern. Every time there is a major conflict we return to EAC, we tend to SADC, we return to Monusco, and then we reform, we reform the Monusco. But unless we take seriously, and unless other countries take seriously the need to have a functional state in DRC with functional institutions, the judiciary, the army, the politics, and give tools to people to hold them to account, we will not have a solution in this region. And this way of supporting weak institutions only because they maintain a acceptable level of instability is very wrong. And I think dealing, and seeing how it is being proposed, it has a very high level of racism. Thank you.

O'HANLON: Thank you. And we admire and wish you well with the work you're doing with Ebutelli and also Lutte pour le Changement and everything else you do with and in Congo. Mvemba, over to you, and then we'll have a final word for Mr. Fayulu, if he'd like, and wrap up.

DIZOLELE: Thank you, Mike. I think Mr. Fayulu, Fred, and all my other co-panelists have actually framed the issue pretty well. I think at this point, when it comes to elections, the train has left the station. I think the last four years were wasted in terms of putting in place the right structure

with the right processes to do that. However, all is not lost. We have, the U.S. has a new ambassador in DRC. We hope there will be a real break from the approach that her predecessor took. The year before, the last few years, we had the U.S. that was very much a cheerleader slogan, churning supporter of the Tshisekedi government, knowing very well that there were serious flaws from the last election. So we hope that Ambassador Tamlyn will be strong and standing fast in support. We know this process is flawed, but we cannot continue supporting this kind of business as usual approach. We should stop with the low, the bigotry of low expectations for DRC. I think that we expect so little of the DRC, when in fact civil society and society at large and the Congolese citizens at large work hard for democracy. The context in which we live today – Fred mentioned Niger and what's happening in Sahel - is not far from what can happen in places like Central Africa. The frustrations are the same. So, the DRC itself, I'm personally a big believer in DRC taking leadership for its own future. We've not seen that. We always ganged up on the DRC. I use that term gang up. Forgive me, but that's the term I'll use. I'm not a big supporter of these regional processes. There's no sense to bring the entire region to a fight where we know who the protagonists are. In the east, it's Rwanda, DRC, and Uganda. So why not have peace with those? Because the regional processes presupposes that everybody has the best interests of the DRC at heart. They don't. They have their own interests. And those countries have no interest in seeing a Congo that works. Therefore, the mission of making the Congo work rests on the Congolese. As I said earlier, I think there is a lot of wasted opportunities, particularly Tshisekedi's side. There was a level of naivety that I'm going to do things better than everybody else and not connecting to what the people really want. So I'm insisting again on this role of having a visionary leadership in the country. The U.S. can play a major role, even though the electoral train has already left the station by strengthening civil society. They're divided now, like Jason says, but there are still strong processes, strong initiatives taking place within civil society. Political parties are weak. They barely are political parties. The individual structure, family members, with clan and so on. The DRC need structural organizational support to build political parties. The likes of NED, National Endowment for Democracy, IRI, CIPE, NDI, needs to be more present in supporting that work, because until then, we'll continue having all this frustration that we continue to have. So I expect that the U.S. should step up to its role, particularly in helping Congo restructure. We cannot wait for the day where everything falls and then start suspending aid and then wondering what happened. We know what has happened over the last 20 years. We know exactly what happened. So we as the West, as much as I am a big proponent of Congo, pulling out of all these processes and trying to rebuild its own, its own ways internally and then deal with this neighborhood directly. Pull out of the Nairobi process, pull out the this Ababa framework. Those process have not worked. They've done what Fred says; as Fredd has said, just keep the bare minimum. So that's going to work. But as much a proponent of that, I believe the U.S. particularly has a role to play in pushing Congo forward in taking its own responsibility. Thank you very much.

O'HANLON: Thank you, Mvemba. And thank you all. Mr. Fayulu, if you're still there and you would like to add a final word, no obligation to. We already benefited greatly, but please, the floor is yours for sort of a final benediction, if you will, or wrap up comment. Sir, over to you.

FAYULU: Thank you. Thank you, Mike. Thank you for the all panelists. And I really agree with them on many things, but just few things. What Mvemba said about the politicians disappointment, the Congolese politician's disappointment. I just want to say that please don't think that all Congolese politicians are the same and you put them on the same back basket. You have corrupt politicians and you have others who really behave according to principles and according to values. All of us, we are not the same. You have some, they need money. They change because the situation has changed. I think we have to see what is going on in the country and who has done what. And secondly, I totally agree with Jason for the need for democracy of Congolese people. That need is huge. Congolese want, if you see when we demonstrate in this country, without the military, militias, UDPS bringing these people with machetes. But you still have the youth. You see the old women, men going on the street to demonstrate. It's very, very huge. When on June 19th, I said no election without the electoral file that's audited by an external body, and the people thought that I was mad. But if you see how the people of Congo has joining me for that, that's including the Catholic Church and the Protestant church, and you see that the need for

democracy is huge in this country. And also, I agree with both Stephanie and Mvemba when they said that to the Eastern African Community, SADC, all those solutions are not solutions. We really need the what is crushing in this country is the legitimate institutions and the rulers is to achieve just what the Fed said. We need the election, the transparent, inclusive, impartial election so we Congolese people will vote for those who present their program and not that' you wait until the situation get worse and then you come, you say, we have taken notes and we agree and this and that. Please. What we need, the world, the democrats all over the world to help Congolese people, to have legitimate institutions through free, fair, and peaceful elections. Thank you very much.

O'HANLON: Well, thank you all. And to everyone joining us here in North America, there in Congo and everywhere else. We certainly wish the Congolese people the very best in these coming months and years ahead. And I really want to give a personal thank you to all the panelists, as well as my colleagues at Brookings, Melissa Paris Sancho, Alejandra Rocha and others, because this brought together a lot of talent and a lot of ideas, and I think it's an important moment in Congo's history. So with best wishes, certainly for the rest of the summer, but definitely for Congo going into the fall and with hopes for a successful election and future. Signing off now from Brookings. Thank you again for joining us, everyone.

FAYULU: Thank you. Bye.