On the 31st of December 2023, Felix Tshisekedi was reelected President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, following months of uncertainties on the feasibility of the campaign. The election period wasn’t only original in its scale – 43 000 000 voters for 75 000 vote places across 2 million kilometer scare – but also because it combined all national, legislative, provincial and municipal elections at once, raising the number of competing candidates to 100 000.

The official electoral period campaign controlled by the Independent National Electoral Commission (Ceni), or “propaganda period” as many like to call it, started on the 19th of November and ended on the 18th of December, two days before the poll.

During that month, the urban landscape of major cities was overrunned – both visually and audibly - by competing parties, in a great show of ingenuity to occupy every possible inch of the public space with the faces and numbers of their candidates.

The following pictures offer a small glimpse of this unprecedented electoral campaign through the visual metamorphosis of Bukavu, capital of the South-Kivu province in the Eastern part of the country and home of an estimated 1.3 million people.

(numbers in front of the sentences below are just to connect/refer with the pictures in the other file)

1.Important disparities of means can be seen depending on the type of elections candidates are running for. Runners for the presidential – like the current president Felix Tshisekedi here - tend to appear on a great variety of visual support, bigger in scale and made of better quality, in flagrant opposition with the small posters below most provincial candidates are limited to.

2.Various candidates surrounding a more common add poster of a church service.

3.Bukavu deserves better.

4. Save the nation or die.

5. Entrance of the city center main market.

6. City main avenue.

7. Dominating the public space of a city with faces, numbers and logos of a party is obviously a strategic goal in campaigns anywhere. But despite having the highest hydroelectric potential of the continent[1], only 21.5%[2] of the population has access to electricity. Hence, the main electoral battle doesn’t take place on TV screens but on the street.

8. City main square.

9. Taxi station.

10. Rickshaw drivers’ fav.

11. Cycled poster.

12. Various candidates competing for the front of a taxi bike.

13. Land cruiser candidate number 3 edition.

14. Campaign truck.

15. 157 multiplications.

16. Parade of a candidate – Copies and the original.

17. Cape and shirts – backs parade.

18. Drunkers dancing in praise of a candidate with her stickers on faces.

19. Candidate irruption during a boxing match main event.

20. The “propaganda period” can have a certain impact on the city's economic activities. Not only is every possible poster spot rented and streets filled with free clothes portraying the candidates, but people can also earn money when participating in candidate’s public marches.

21. Gas station.

22. Bucket of a kid selling sodas.

23. Stickers in a hair salon.

24. Flaglet on bike mirror.

25. Watches and bracelets seller’s box.

26. Chapati vendor’s umbrella.

27. At a beer depot.

28. 109 scarf.

30. Crowd.

31. Winners smile.

Despites the election results being strongly contested by the opposition, after an electoral process called a “gigantic organized disorder”[3] by the country Catholic church – a key institution in the country political history – the formidable amount of candidates and their efforts are at least showing wrong the words of former dictator Mobutu who used to say that “democracy is not for Africa”[4].

[1] https://www.afdb.org/fr/documents/republique-democratique-du-congo-projet-de-rehabilitation-et-renforcement-des-centrales-hydroelectriques-dinga-et-du-reseau-de-distribution-de-kinshasa-projet-pmede-project-appraisal-report#:~:text=De%20par%20son%20potentiel%20(100.000,potentiel%20mondial%20en%20%C3%A9nergie%20hydraulique.

[2] https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.ZS?locations=CD

[3] https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/dr-congo-full-plate-challenges-after-turbulent-vote

[4] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000096387