

The Landscape of Armed Groups in the Eastern Congo

Summary/Zusammenfassung

Two decades of armed conflict have created a complex topography in the eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to 2017 estimates, over 120 distinguishable armed groups of all sorts and shapes operate across the two Kivu provinces alone. While some of them comprise no more than 10-20 combatants and function largely as bandit or vigilante groups, others dispose over large-scale – either centralised or guerrilla-styled – command structures, supply routes, and sophisticated tactics of taxation and order-making.

Almost all these groups commit violent acts against either civilian populations or opposed actors. Nonetheless, a majority of these groups also embody political and communal ideologies. Whether self-defence, grievances over land and/or resources, political participation, or others and whether justified or not, is subject to respective debate. The project's regular mapping, biographical and genealogical exercises provide basic information on the evolving topography of and conflict dynamics around these *armed groups operating in the DRC*. Based on in-depth fieldwork and a network of Congolese researchers and partners, the project continuously investigates the politico-military landscape of eastern DRC in terms of strength and impact on ongoing politico-military developments. However, and given the pitfalls of flat mapping as well as the constantly fluctuating situation in the eastern Congo, the maps do not by any means endorse any *dominant narratives* of state failure. Rather they serve as a resource to underpin the complex intricacies of *state and non-state governance*, and the arena in which *statehood is negotiated* among a variety of actors claiming authority in eastern Congo.

Since 2017, the mapping exercises have become part of a new collaborative research project led by the Congo Research Group hosted at New York University. Called Kivu Security Tracker, this project involves a broader attempt to map insecurity. More information: <https://kivusecurity.org/about/project> and <https://suluhu.org/congo/>

Keywords/Suchbegriffe

Conflict, Security, Armed Groups, Congo, Authority

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