Access to Voting in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Initial Analysis

The November 2011 Elections

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a large country with very limited infrastructure, as well as serious ethnic, historical, and political divisions. The presidential election planning in mid-2011 was behind schedule and faced significant logistical challenges, to the extent that some observers called for the government to postpone the polls. A delay might have helped preparations, but had the potential to create constitutional problems and upset the population. Elections began on November 28th as scheduled, and allegations of fraud began to surface as the polls continued. The incumbent, Joseph Kabila, was declared the winner. Despite protests from civil society, and, unsurprisingly, opposition candidates, Kabila maintains that he won and continues to hold the office. That there were irregularities is certain; whether these were significant enough to sway the election is less clear.

Methodology

The five maps below show factors that could influence access throughout the registration and voting process, roughly in chronological order. Insecurity can limit mobility, and the first map shows an approximation of security concerns throughout the country, based on the number of internally displaced people and security incidents in the year before the elections. The availability of a local polling station could also contribute to whether or not a person is able to vote, and the second map shows the population per polling station by province. Even those who voted may not have been be counted; the government reported figures from most, but not all, polling sites, and the third map shows the percentage of polling stations per province whose results were not compiled. Among the areas counted, there were invalid and blank ballots that were excluded, which is shown in the fourth map. Finally, there were also numerous reports of election incidents; the final map shows verified reports from a Ushahidi website that compiles reports of electoral fraud and violence, which were sent in by mobile phone. The large "Obstacles to Voting" map compiles the data in the five smaller maps to see the areas with the most challenges.
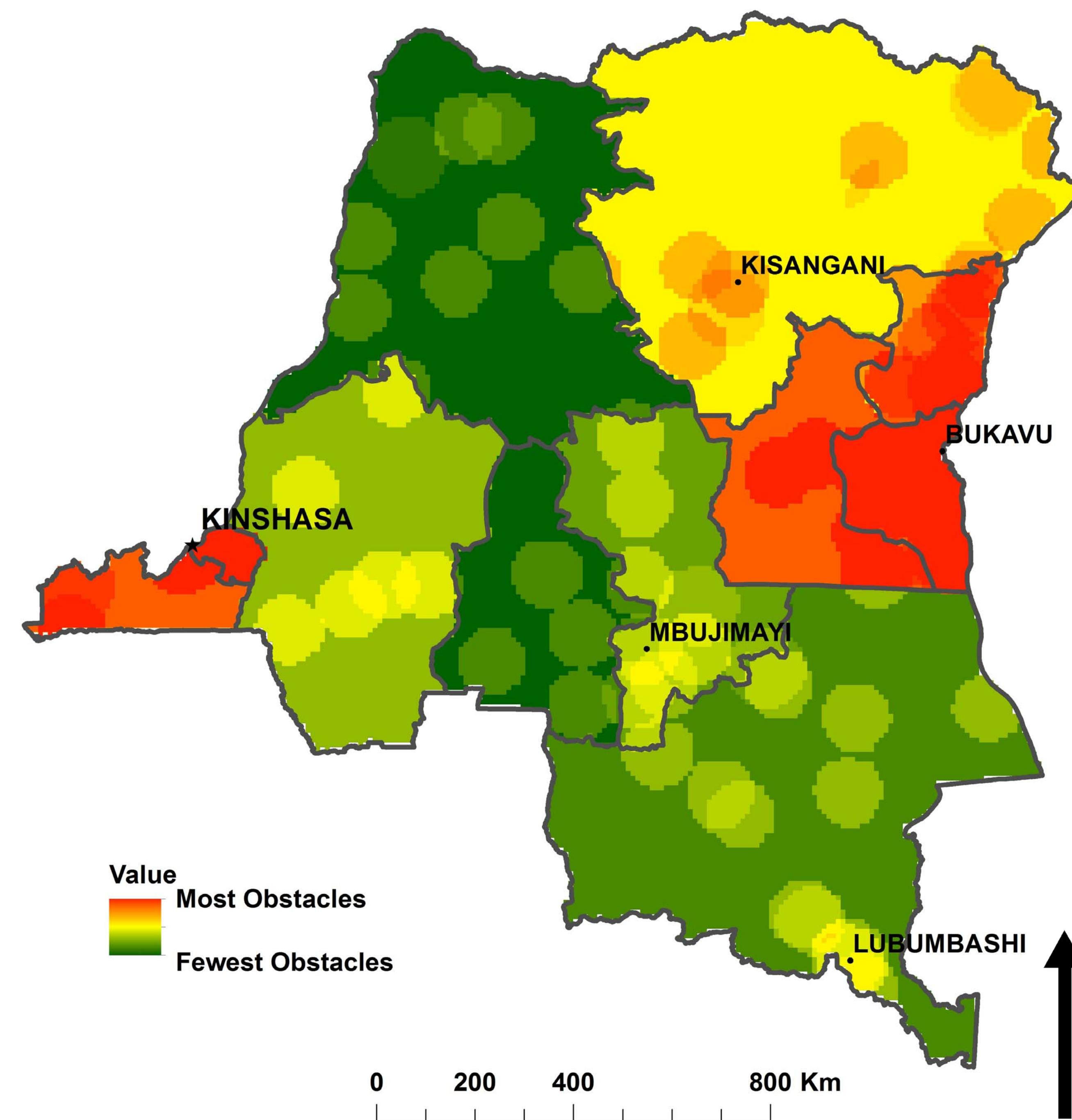
Limitations

This poster demonstrates some initial steps toward election analysis by identifying influential factors and using available data, but cannot be used for definitive conclusions. Kinshasa and the unstable Kivus are the most visibly problematic areas in the large map, but other cities also emerge as points of concern. However, the more rural and isolated areas are unlikely to be able to report fraud publicly, or protest in large numbers, so that may have contributed to the relative lack of complaints. Much of the data included in these maps is focused at the provincial level, which limits analysis of such a diverse and big country. Ushahidi-sourced reports are a powerful tool for election monitoring, but have limited utility in a country with vast areas that do not have access to a mobile network. The data related to polling stations and ballots originate from the Congolese government, rather than an impartial source.

Furthermore, certain important data are not available on the national level for DRC, leading to outstanding questions. Understanding access to voting requires detailed lists of the locations of voter registration sites and polling stations, as well as in-depth knowledge of the country's limited road network and populated areas. Monitoring data per registration site and polling station would be very useful. Finally, information about the actors responsible for fraud, as well as the most politically competitive areas, could help to identify strategic manipulation of results by candidates and their supporters.
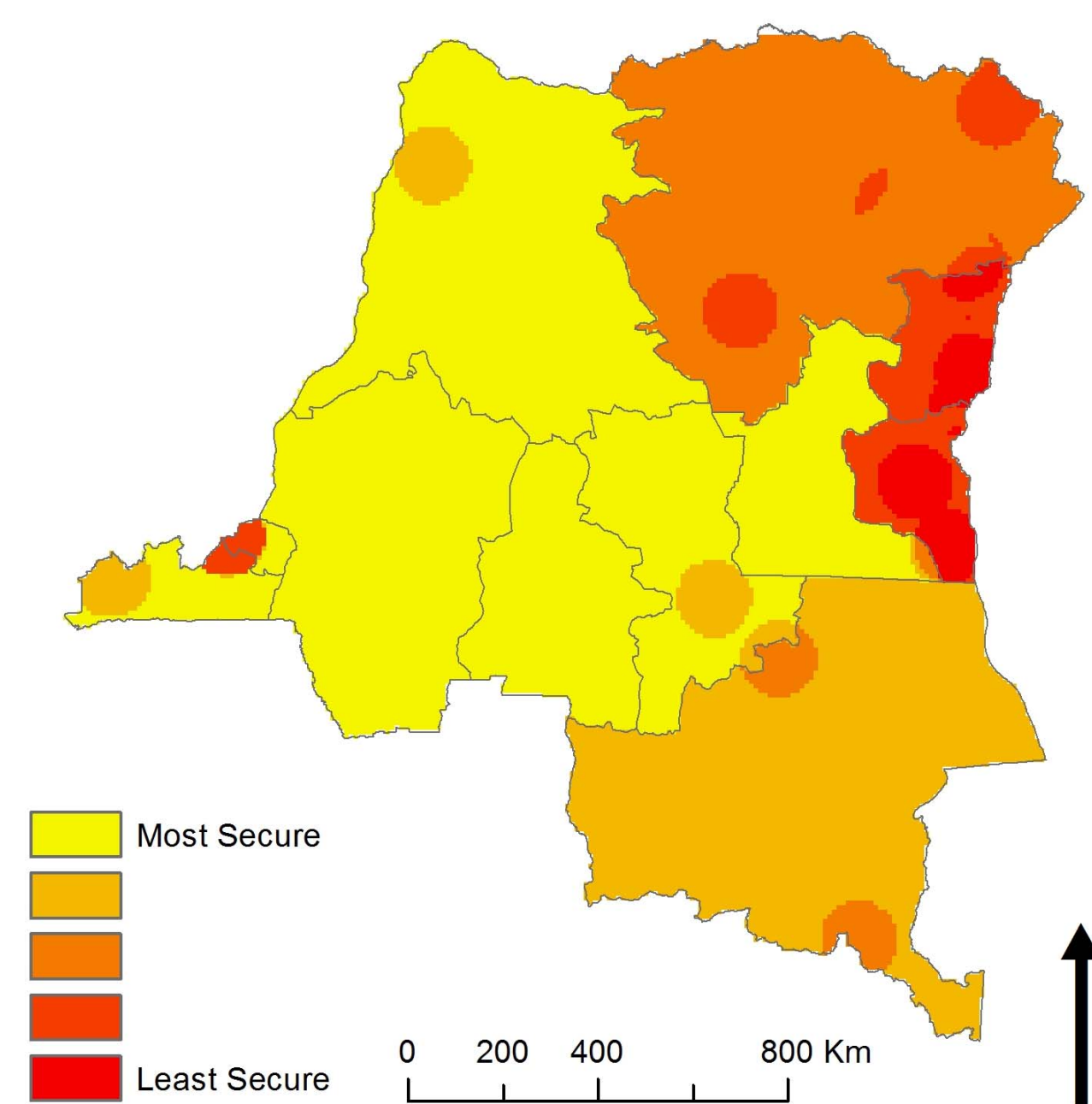
Looking Ahead

GIS has the potential to contribute significantly to the preparation and monitoring of elections. In countries like the DRC, where there are concerns about free and fair voting, spatial analysis of high-risk areas could facilitate the decision of where to place monitors during voter registration and elections. Although conclusions are not possible for the most recent Congolese presidential elections, data collection for and analysis of the factors mentioned above could help observers to evaluate allegations of interference in future elections, both in the DRC and elsewhere.
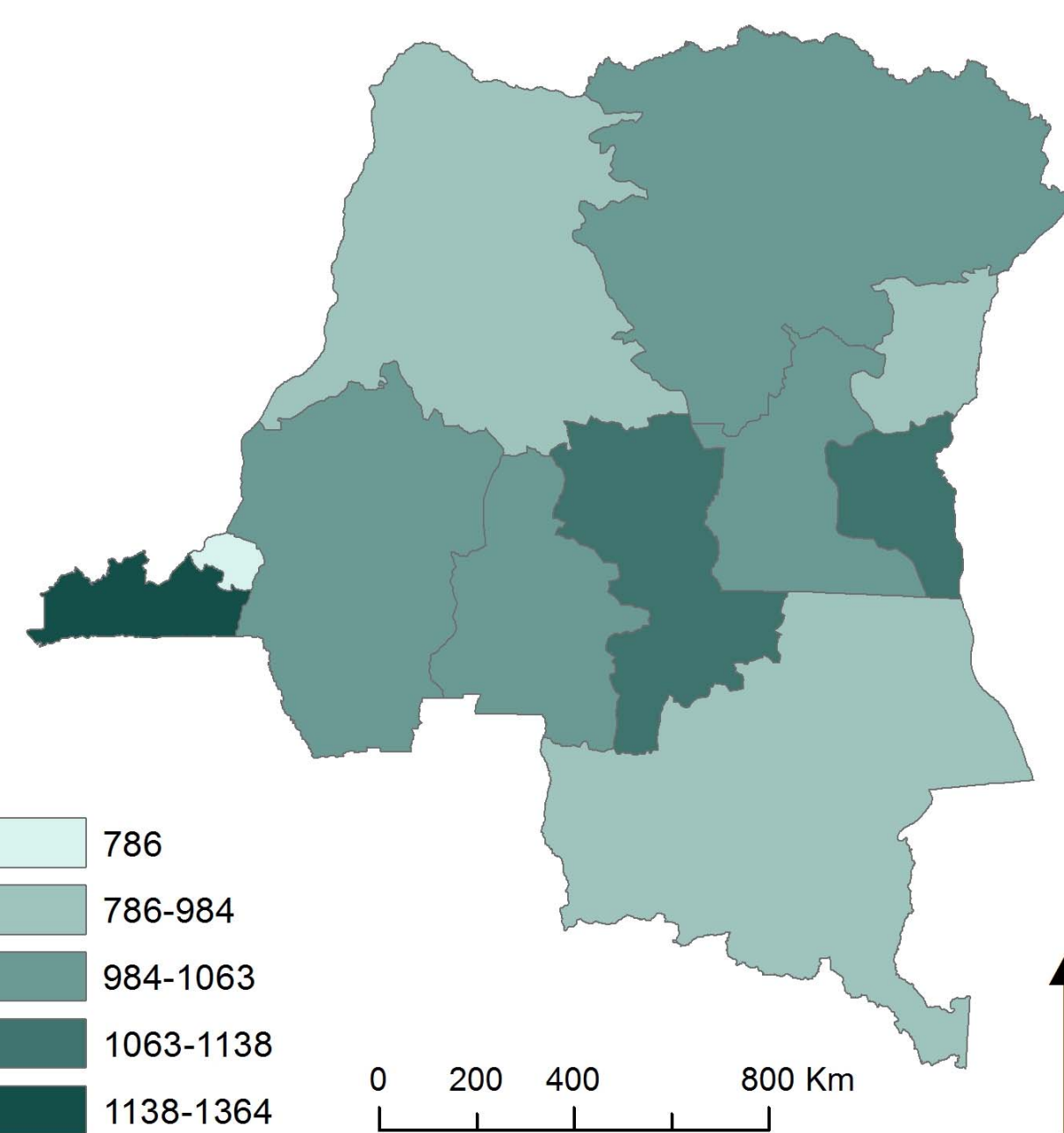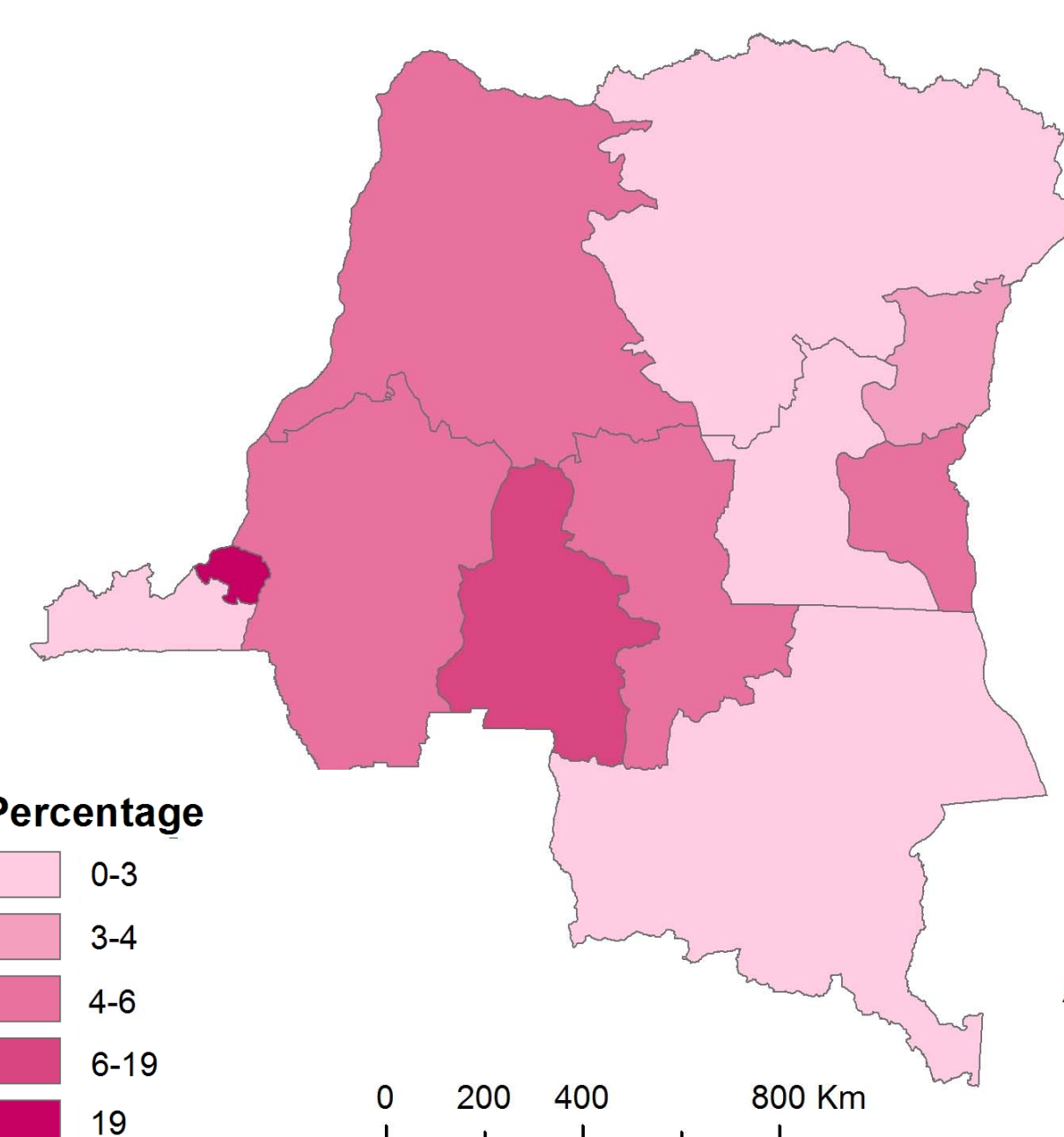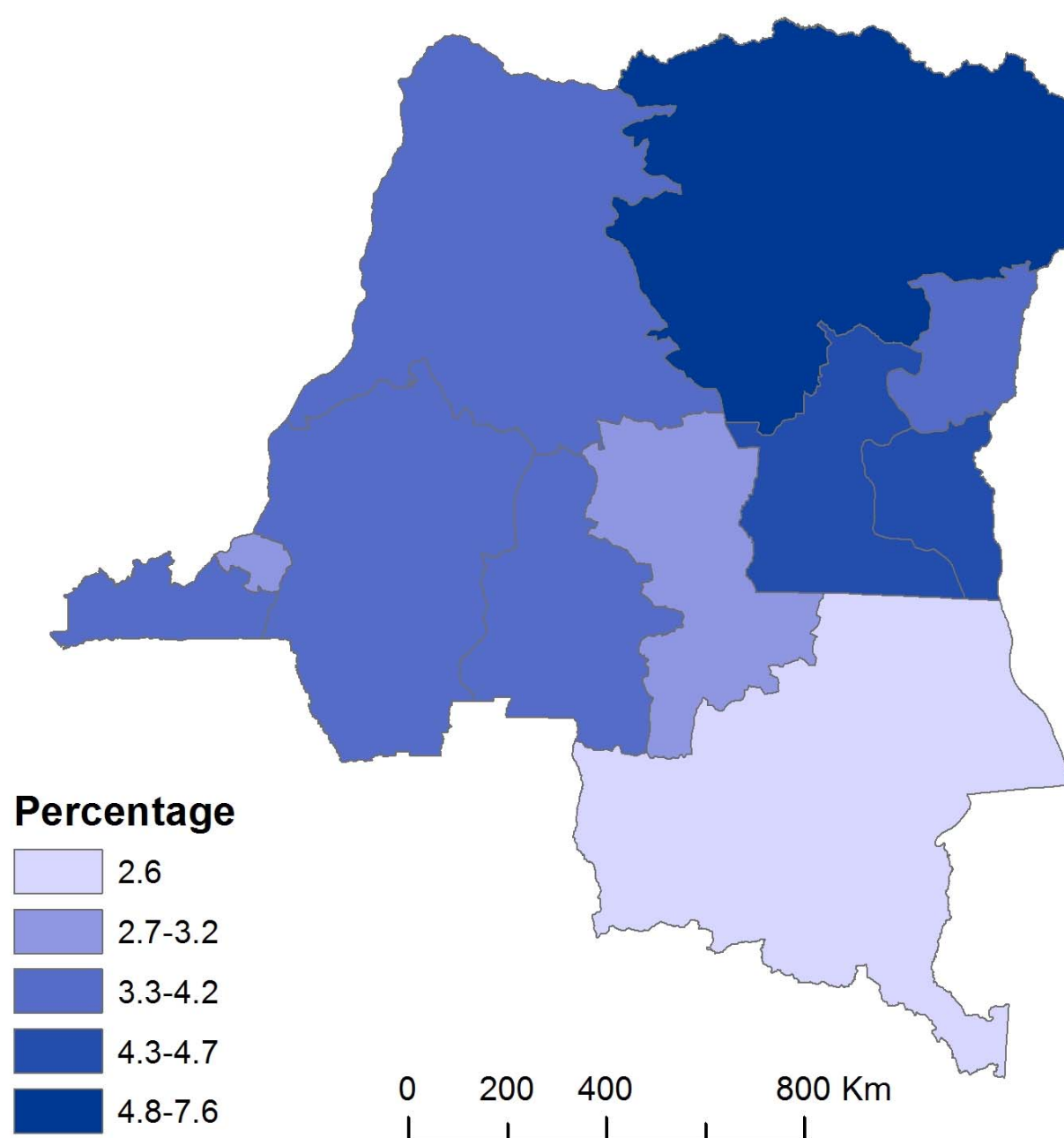
Obstacles to Voting

KISANGANI
BUKAVU
KINSHASA
MBUJIMAYI
LUBUMBASHI

Value
Most Obstacles
Fewest Obstacles

0   200   400   800 Km

Security Context

Most Secure
Least Secure

0 200 400 800 Km

Population per Polling Station

786
786-984
984-1063
1063-1138
1138-1364

0 200 400 800 Km

Excluded Polling Stations

Percentage
0-3
3-4
4-6
6-19
19

0 200 400 800 Km

Invalid and Blank Ballots

Percentage
2.6
2.7-3.2
3.3-4.2
4.3-4.7
4.8-7.6

0 200 400 800 Km

Election Incident Reports

1-2
3-5
6-10
11-30
31-60

0 200 400 800 Km