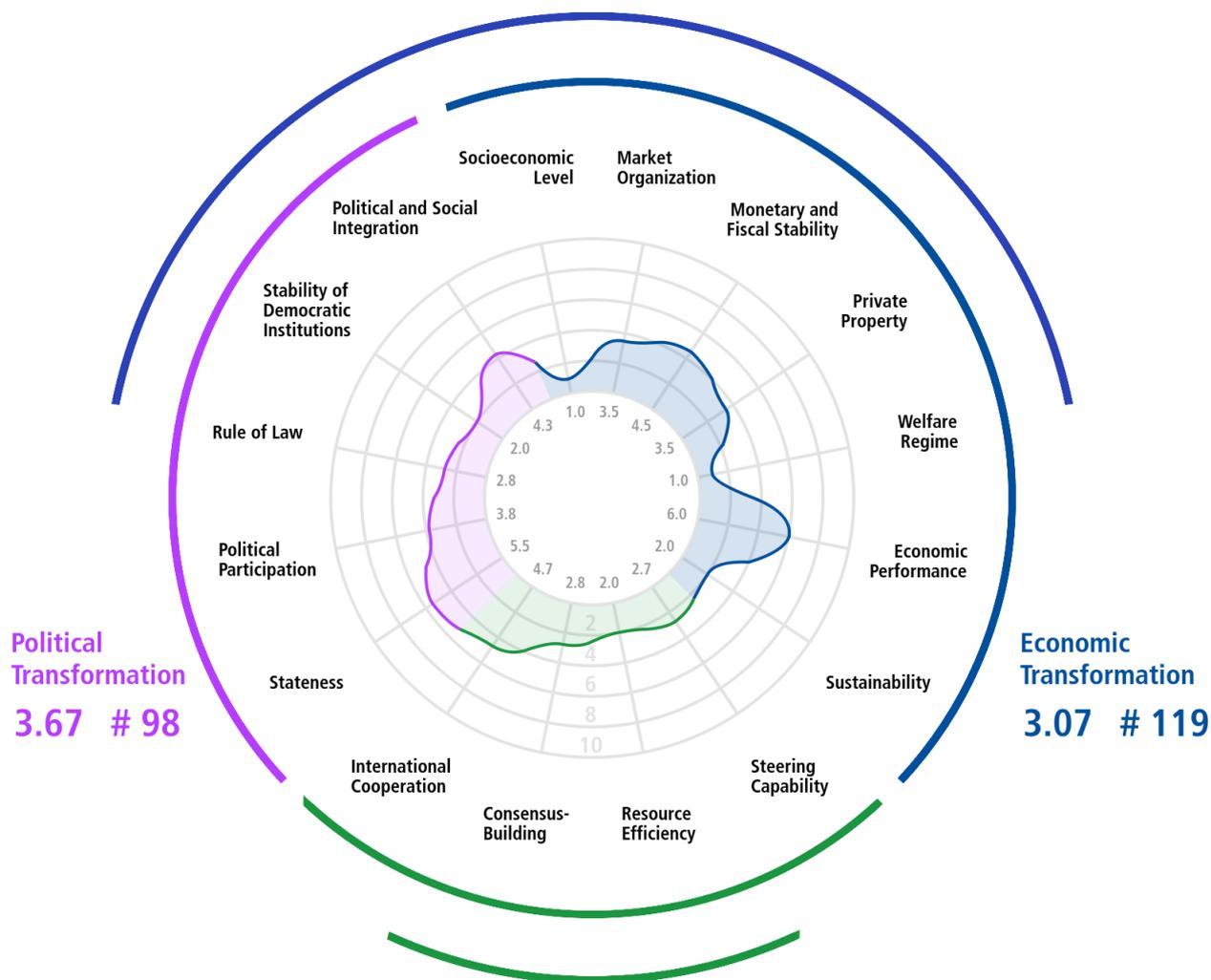


Congo, DR

Status Index

3.37 # 117

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Governance Index

2.87 # 117

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024**. It covers the period from February 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	99.0	HDI	0.479	GDP p.c., PPP \$	1337
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	3.2	HDI rank of 189	179	Gini Index	42.1
Life expectancy	years	59.2	UN Education Index	0.507	Poverty ³	% 87.8
Urban population	%	46.8	Gender inequality ²	0.601	Aid per capita \$	36.9

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

During the period under review, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) did not make any substantial progress in terms of democratic and economic transformation.

Many factors, primarily repeated human rights abuses, widespread corruption within the administration, and the leadership's inability to devise and implement long-lasting and appropriate policies, have blocked the democratic and economic development of the country. DR Congo state structures have remained either extremely weak or simply nonexistent.

While much of the country enjoyed relative peace and stability, the state's monopoly on violence was largely deficient in Ituri, Maniema, Mai-Ndombe, Kasai, and the eastern parts. Several military operations backed by the United Nations and most recently the EAC, in alliance with the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), have failed to defeat the rebel group M23. The M23 is currently capturing several entities in North Kivu, perpetuating violence in the country.

The country's positive economic performance, with considerable GDP growth, did not have a meaningful impact on the Congolese population, the majority of whom remain severely poor.

The implementation of economic policies has only been possible due to constant pressure from the IMF, World Bank, and international donors. The country's leaders have not shown a genuine willingness or capacity to strategically prioritize and devise suitable long-term policies and implementation strategies to set the country on a sustainable course to democracy and economic development. During the reporting period, the focus on the upcoming elections and finding a means for President Tshisekedi to retain power outweighed any considerations of long-term strategic planning.

Under the current circumstances, no major change should be expected from the forthcoming 2023 general elections. President Tshisekedi and his political coalition are likely to win and consolidate their power.

Because the country still relies on international assistance, it is important that international partners strictly require strong signals from Congolese leaders on strengthening the fight against corruption, committing to financially empower the decentralized system of government under the 26 provinces, and promoting social reconciliation, especially at community levels. Reforms undertaken in certain areas, such as the security sector and the education system, require more attention in order to effectively pursue economic and political transformation.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

For many decades, the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) has been one of successive conflicts, economic mismanagement, widespread elite corruption, constant external meddling, and severe socioeconomic problems. The combined domestic and external pressures of the 1990s did little to prevent President Mobutu from obstructing the country's imminent political and economic transformations. In 1996, but primarily after Mobutu's forceful overthrow in 1997, the DR Congo entered a long period of wars within wars and continued regionally-confined violent conflicts, which various peace initiatives have failed to effectively end.

Struggles for power and control of the natural riches of the country, the absence of a reliable system of leadership alternation, and most importantly, the continued pervasive culture of corruption among Congolese leaders, have left no room for the country to effectively embark on the process of devising and implementing appropriate reform policies of development.

The Belgian-administered colonial period was marked by particularly brutal force and extreme exploitation of resources to the detriment of the local population. This situation led to a scenario where, by the time of independence in 1960, only a few Congolese individuals had received higher education or possessed the necessary skills to govern the country's politics and economy. Additionally, traditional socioeconomic structures had either been nonexistent or simply inadequate for the entire country.

The country's political conflicts began in 1960, after it gained independence from Belgian colonial rule. Ethnic rivalries, army mutinies, political struggles over access to state leadership offices, the isolation – and then assassination – of the country's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961, and a widespread partition of the country as a result of regional secessions, are a few of the political characteristics of the post-independence era. Mobutu's 1965 coup d'état paved the way for his 32-year authoritarian regime, during which only a very few individuals directly linked to him benefited from a system that misused public funds for private purposes on a large scale.

During Mobutu's years of dictatorship, there was little room for sociopolitical mobilization, and every attempt at it was stifled, either by force or co-option. However, when vital support from Western allies diminished after the end of the Cold War, Mobutu was forced to open up the political sphere in the 1990s. He introduced a multiparty system and formally engaged in a political

dialogue during the Sovereign National Conference (CNS). The conference was attended by over 2,000 representatives of political parties and civil society groups, which multiplied after the political opening. However, to a large degree, they lacked both a constituency and a program or objective.

Nevertheless, the CNS produced a wide range of detailed recommendations that were never implemented. In fact, when, for the first time since 1965, a prime minister was elected (Etienne Tshisekedi from the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS)), and a transitional government was installed in 1992, Mobutu reacted by establishing a parallel government and intensifying the systematic plundering of state resources. Planned elections were continuously postponed. During the years between 1990 and 1995, any remnants of the formal economic sector collapsed, and plundering and armed violence – mostly in the East – soared.

With the major support of the impoverished and socially desperate population, a rebel movement, Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL), launched a campaign against Mobutu in 1996. Enjoying unofficial substantial international support, but militarily backed primarily by Rwanda and Uganda, AFDL successfully ousted the 32-year regime of Mobutu. Its leader, Laurent Désiré Kabila, proclaimed himself head of state on May 17, 1997. Laurent Kabila's leadership did not differ from his predecessor. Equally authoritarian, he exclusively controlled and made use of all forms of power. The population's quality of life worsened, and no improvement was made in relation to respect for human rights.

Kabila's leadership destroyed and blocked every existing initiative to promote the rule of law and the necessary economic transformation and democratic infrastructure. He also led the DR Congo into a new war from 1998 to 2002. Initially perceived as an internal disagreement within AFDL, the crisis quickly escalated into a regional war. The conflict pitted external government armies, mainly from Rwanda and Uganda, against each other, just as they had been implicated in the 1996 war. This time, they formed alliances with several newly formed rebel movements against Laurent Kabila's regime. The war, attracted by the DR Congo's abundant natural resources, also involved several multinational companies and complex local, national, and regional interests. As a result, the country's remaining infrastructure was destroyed, and the DR Congo was plunged into the world's largest humanitarian catastrophe. Laurent Kabila was assassinated in January 2001, and his son Joseph Kabila succeeded him. Joseph Kabila resumed peaceful negotiations with various rebel groups, political party representatives, and delegates from civil society after taking office. Following the deployment of the world's largest United Nations peacekeeping force (MONUC, currently MONUSCO) throughout the country, a negotiated power-sharing government was installed in 2003. The main task of this government was to restore overall state authority and organize long-awaited democratic elections.

In 2006, in what was largely accepted as the country's first democratic elections since 1960, Joseph Kabila was re-elected to office. Despite a contested re-election in 2011, Kabila would continue to hold power until December 2018.

The major characteristics of Joseph Kabila's administration – such as officials' notorious corruption, inappropriate governance, lack of transparency in policymaking and implementation, and continuous serious human rights abuses – have maintained the DR Congo as an unsuitable

environment for most private foreign investors. Major attempts to reform the country's economic and financial sector have either been shown to be inadequate, never translated into expected results or have simply been silently abandoned.

While elected parliamentarians continued to produce many laws, actual power remained confined to the country's presidency, and their body primarily served as a rubber stamp of President Kabila's priorities. Kabila's successive governments' major attempts to reform the country's economic and financial sector either proved inadequate, failed to yield expected results or were quietly abandoned.

As a result of continued international sponsorships, including a deal with China for infrastructural development in exchange for DR Congo's mineral riches, there has been marginal economic growth in the last decade of Kabila's two mandates. However, this growth has not really translated into a sustainable redistribution of income or improved service delivery to the population. The majority of the population continued to live in extreme poverty with less than \$1.25 a day.

As a result of local and international pressure, national presidential and parliamentary elections were ultimately held on December 30, 2018. Despite contestations and the rejection of the elections as not free or fair, the country's Constitutional Court confirmed the results, which had proclaimed Félix Tshisekedi as the country's fifth president.

Continued violence in much of the eastern parts of the country deters most potential investors in the country. Emerging and renewed insurgent movements continue to confront and offer military challenges to the elected Kinshasa government, the United Nations, and EAC military support missions, in defiance of the ongoing peace efforts. Whereas President Tshisekedi's efforts have so far resulted in improving the country's international standing and cooperation with its international partners, the economic growth that has occurred is still not benefiting the majority of the Congolese population, who continue to live in extreme poverty. Widespread corruption and unsuitable project leadership continue to hinder efforts to set up the right development agenda and obstruct the development and implementation of suitable long-term policies.

In general, the country's political and military elite are more involved in the constant looting of public funds for personal enrichment, instead of showing a strict commitment to policy implementation in order to promote and preserve constitutional democracy, fulfill their social responsibility, and effectively enhance an ecologically sustainable market economy. The government prioritizes short-term policies – often financial regulations and adjustments – to retain the cooperation of the IMF, the World Bank, and some international donors.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

Shortcomings in the state's monopoly on the use of force remain considerable and palpable in many parts of the country. Emerging and renewed insurgent movements continue to seriously challenge the government's monopoly on the use of force. Many of these movements are confined to the most devastated eastern region, especially in Ituri, North and South Kivu, and parts of Maniema and Tanganyika provinces. Additionally, there were reliable reports of ongoing violence in the periphery of the Kasai and Maï-Ndombe provinces.

On May 6, 2021, due to the ongoing conflict in the provinces of North Kivu (with Goma as the provincial capital) and Ituri, an "état de siege" was declared, transferring governmental responsibility to the military and imposing martial law. This status remains in effect today.

The national army (FARDC) remains disintegrated and unable to control the entire territory of the country or fulfill various political commitments, such as effectively incorporating numerous former rebel groups. Systematic and widespread corruption within the FARDC, as well as its lack of equipment, among other challenges, continue to significantly impede its professionalization and efforts to fully monopolize the use of force across the country.

Furthermore, despite the change in its leadership and its endowment with a much-needed military planning law, the FARDC has failed to kickstart its much-expected renewal. It still suffers from split command loyalty and is frequently accused of civilian looting, rape, and various human rights violations.

Despite an important milestone in the reform of the Congolese national police, there are still significant shortcomings across the country, especially in rural areas where a considerable proportion of the population is concentrated and where violence most often begins.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

3

'06 '24 10



The MONUSCO forces – faced with the challenges of sophisticatedly equipped foreign-backed armed groups – continue to dramatically fail to help establish an acceptable security environment.

Thus, during the past two years under review, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has remained unstable and has served as a safe haven for emerging local and foreign armed groups. These groups persist in successfully challenging the state’s monopoly on the use of force.

Despite the violent history of the state, its immense territory, and the diversity of its ethnic groups, languages, and cultures, the Congolese have a remarkably strong sense of national identity. The notion and existence of a “One Congolese” nation-state have unanimously remained sacrosanct. Even though continued violence has maintained some portions of the country in different spheres of power and influence, no single armed party has ever advocated secession.

All major groups in the country, including ethnic groups, regionally based groups, political parties, and civil society organizations, have unquestionably remained supportive of the “indivisible nation-state” notion.

Despite its failure to fulfill its public obligations, the Congolese state maintains a visible national identity that a significant number of Congolese proudly adhere to, despite infrequent connections between different parts of the vast country.

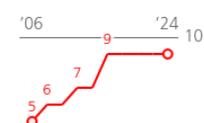
While the citizenship and civic rights issues were constitutionally addressed in 2006, major discrimination patterns between certain ethnic groups in the country remain common, particularly in the eastern provinces. In the Kivu provinces, this is partially attributed to the inadequate dissemination of the 2006 constitution, which has allowed some ethnic groups to unjustly question the citizenship of Congolese individuals of Rwandan origin. Government efforts to dissociate law-abiding Congolese citizens of Rwandan origin from those involved in rebel armed groups have yet to demonstrate their efficacy.

The country’s constitution provides for an unequivocal separation of the state and the church. Christian churches, especially the Catholic Church – still the largest in membership – exert considerable social influence through the provision of educational and health care services.

Minority churches, such as the Kimbanguistes, and Muslims also exert a visible social influence. While church leaders try to engage in politics as part of civil society, educating or defending the interests of the masses, most politicians try to associate with them in order to gather support from church members.

State identity

9



1

No interference of religious dogmas

8



1

However, the significant influence exerted by religious actors does not result in religiously motivated legislation that would not have otherwise been enacted. Instead, traditionally, the Catholic Church has been critical of the government.

For many decades, the territorial scope of the Congolese administration has been very limited. The rural areas remained largely free of state representation and service delivery, including any kind of basic services, such as fresh drinking water, electricity, sanitation, education and health care. Access to a basic water source (46% of the population), access to basic sanitation (15.4%) and access to electricity (19.1%) are severely limited. Efforts to restore the state administrative infrastructure through the government's development plan for the DR Congo's 145 territorial districts (PDL-145 T) have failed to produce the expected results. The reform of the judicial system, one of the most important state infrastructures upon which President Tshisekedi had based his presidential campaign, has still not been extended to most rural areas. In a few major cities where the infrastructure exists, the judiciary is partial and inefficient. Thus, the DR Congo remains a country with largely nonexistent and ineffective administrative infrastructure, the performance of which remains impaired by corruption, a lack of professionalism, and ethnic rivalries.

Basic administration

2

'06 '24 10



2 | Political Participation

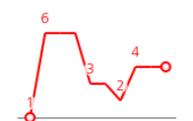
General multiparty elections are held, but serious irregularities during the voting process and ballot count usually occur.

The latest general elections produced an unusual result after Joseph Kabila did not seek a third term, following a two-year delay, presidential, legislative, and provincial elections were held in December 2018. The National Independent Electoral Commission declared opposition candidate Felix Tshisekedi the winner of the 2018 presidential election. The 2018 election was marred by irregularities and criticized by some observers, including the Council of Bishops, which stated the results did not match those of their observation mission. Many sources saw the other opposition candidate, Martin Fayulu, as the winner. Despite this, the 2019 inauguration of President Tshisekedi was the first peaceful transfer of power in the country's history.

Free and fair elections

4

'06 '24 10



While the presidential elections seem to have been rigged in favor of an opposition candidate – supposedly easier to handle for the Kabila establishment – the legislative elections returned a different result: Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress political party won only 32 seats in the National Assembly, whereas the Common Front for Congo coalition, close to former president, won an absolute majority of 335 seats out of 500 seats total. Senatorial elections were held in March 2019 through an indirect vote by provincial assemblies.

Regarding upcoming elections, the Congolese Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) scheduled the fourth national presidential and parliamentary elections for December 20, 2023.

Opposition parties' concerns and organizational constraints (financial and logistical) for a country as vast as the DR Congo without any adequate transportation system and in which violence is in many parts still ongoing, raise serious doubts as to whether elections will take place as scheduled.

If eventually held under the current circumstances, these elections are unlikely to be completely free or/and fair, and could trigger another cycle of widespread violent protests throughout the country in case of contestations.

Even though opposition parties are likely to be given more political freedom than previously to stage their campaigns, President Tshisekedi is likely to be declared the winner. The CENI and the Constitutional Court are headed by his allies. He has bolstered his support within the military and restructured some of the highest positions. To date, the resurgence of the conflict with Rwanda and the continued violence in the eastern parts of the country have not affected his poll lead significantly nor positively affected the popular support of one of his potential challengers.

Scheduled for 2007 as required by the country's constitution, then postponed, local elections have never been held. Instead, President Tshisekedi, as did his predecessor, appointed the officials. Local elections are scheduled to be held together with the presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2023.

Although the conflict-ridden areas of the country remained evasive, through power-sharing with other elected parliamentarians under the Union Sacrée, President Tshisekedi has considerable power to preside over all important government matters. Influential individuals, such as the president's direct family members and powerful cronies, are known to informally control different areas of government and account for many official state decisions. Elected officials tasked with government oversight such as parliamentarians are usually corrupt. Nevertheless, this reality does not alone account for the country's governance problems. Other factors, such as the quasi-nonexistence of state institutions, the persistent culture of corruption and the inappropriate expertise of leaders, are far more important.

Constitutionally, Congolese are allowed to freely form and operate any political or civic organization. However, the political system is primarily shaped for those organizations operating in favor of the president's ruling coalition. City leaders and agencies of law and order frequently intimidate and weaken opponents. Although freedom of association and assembly seems to have improved marginally, since May 2021, President Tshisekedi has declared a state of siege (similar to a state of emergency) in the eastern DR Congo's provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, appointing military and police officers to replace civilian authorities and granting them

Effective power to govern

3

'06 '24 10



Association / assembly rights

4

'06 '24 10



extraordinary powers, including the power to restrict freedoms (including the right of peaceful assembly and association) and prosecute civilians before military courts. While the National Assembly backs the renewal of this state of siege every time, to date no evaluation of its effectiveness has ever reached the debate floor. Therefore, in the current political environment, even though opposition organizations are formally allowed to exist, their influence remains limited. In a country where politics is something of a zero-sum game, the civilian opposition political parties are frequently divided (and sometimes easier to corrupt), making them usually too weak to confront the government effectively.

The right to freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed. Its practice is, however, often restricted. The U.S. State Department reports serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and the existence of criminal libel laws.

The DR Congo has a multitude of commercial, community, and faith-based radio and television stations, some of which are owned by opposition leaders. While there has been a slight improvement in efforts to guarantee this right in the early presidency of Tshisekedi, during the review period there have been widespread reports of state harassment, criminal defamation suits, threats, detentions, arbitrary arrests, and physical attacks against citizens, organizations and journalists that express opposing opinions to the president and his government's priorities. The Journalist in Danger (JED) watchdog, human rights and other civil society organizations report several cases of abuse, such as the assassination of three journalists in 2021, and the detention and censure of at least 106 others, with the case of Jacky Ndala being among the most known. In 2022, DR Congo received a score of 19/100 in Freedom House's Global Press Freedom Rankings, which classified the country as "Not Free."

3 | Rule of Law

The 2006 constitution guarantees a separation of power between the executive, the legislative, the independent judicial system and an effectively functioning free media sector. In practice, however, there are no appropriate checks and balances among these powers. With the political coalition that includes the majority of elected officials under President Tshisekedi's political platform Union Sacrée, and the appointments of allies to the state's strategic structures such as in the Constitutional Courts, the exercise of power is comfortably consolidated in the president's office. The president, sometimes through his close associates, controls and dominates all sectors of the political, legislative and judicial systems, which often only serve as rubber-stamp institutions. While the parliament sometimes allows debates over certain important state matters (as was the case with Chinese developmental

Freedom of expression

4

'06 _____ '24 10



1

Separation of powers

3

'06 _____ '24 10



1

contracts), it is widely known that these debates amount to nothing whenever they challenge the president's will and/or the government's core agenda.

Oversight is usually limited to the performance of officials who have not joined the president's platform. When an ally is found guilty of publicly exposed corruption, justice is usually only partially applied. Such officials are often arrested and then freed after a few months, usually as a result of a direct intervention by the president's office or his close allies.

Patronage practices are important means for the sustained consolidation of power in the person of President Tshisekedi. State interests matter less and are often subordinated to the president's own pressing priorities and strategies to maintain power.

While the reform of the justice system is the most important promise of President Tshisekedi, there has been no tangible progress. While the president continues to emphasize his campaign's moto "Etat de droit" (Rule of Law), and every provision is made in theory for the judiciary to be independent, in practice, it continues to be overburdened, underfinanced, and severely undermined by political influence and corruption. Appointed directly by the president, upon proposal by the High Council of the Judiciary whose members owe loyalty to the president to maintain their office, members of the judiciary lack independence. Juridical prosecution of the president's allies over abuse of office is rarely enforced. The courts are completely subordinate to political and military authorities. For commercial or civilian matters, they are notoriously known to return favorable verdicts for the highest bidder or for those with direct connections to political and military authorities.

While criminal laws to prosecute officials for corruption and abuses exist, most officials go unpunished, or verdicts to punish their abuses are either lightly or simply not at all enforced. The prosecution is usually used to demote and weaken potential competitors rather than to promote the rule of law. Most frequently, public prosecutions are only a show to gather support for the president. Usually, prosecuted officials are arrested and never heard from again, quietly freed, or avoid arrest either because they have connections to powerful elites or because they buy their freedom. Vital Kamerhe, an ally and former chief of staff of President Tshisekedi, who was prosecuted for embezzling many millions of U.S. dollars assigned to the 100-day presidential program, has been finally released from prison after an unusually short sentence. The president's strategic adviser, who stepped down from his position over allegations of wrongdoing, escaped condemnation in the courts, even though the evidence against him is well publicized. Sometimes, these officials are redeployed to other functions, where public appearances are less required.

Independent
judiciary

2

'06 '24 10



Prosecution of
office abuse

3

'06 '24 10



Civil rights, even though constitutionally recognized for all, are generally not respected in the DR Congo. Violations of civil rights, especially those of women in the war-torn regions (right to life, security and physical integrity), were frequent in the past two years, usually committed by the state's security forces tasked with protecting civilians. Because the courts of justice do not function properly, these abuses have gone largely unpunished. Through many integrations of rebel groups, the FARDC continues to employ many high-ranking military officials who are known to have committed serious abuses of civil rights. In general, the practice of the respecting civil rights has remained very poor.

The U.S. State Department reports that LGBTQ+ persons were targeted by particular forms of gender-based violence, including “corrective” rape. Most survivors of rape did not pursue formal legal action due to insufficient resources, lack of confidence in the justice system, family pressure, and fear of subjecting themselves to humiliation, reprisal, or both.

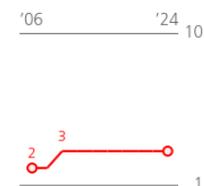
4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Despite the provisions of the 2006 constitution and multiple national presidential and parliamentary elections, power is wielded through coalition and patronage politics vested in the person of President Tshisekedi. State institutions, especially parliament and the judiciary with the constitutional role of checks and balances suffer from widespread corruption, a lack of professionalism and consistently poor performance. While the country does not lack highly qualified elites, the forcefully maintained system of dependence on political patronage dispensed by the president is dangerously disruptive. In essence, there are no functioning democratic institutions, as they are only democratic in name.

Owing to the fact that elections are usually boycotted by opposition parties, there are no strong signs of commitment to democratic institutions. Moreover, institutions are democratic in name but not in practice. While individual institutions are accepted through alliances and/or political patronage, and influential actors such as the president hold vetoes, such acceptance remains unstable over time and usually ceases during the period leading up to new general elections. For the period under review, despite the public interventions of the president and his allies to demonstrate commitment to democratic institutions, the government leadership style (at the center of which is the culture of patronage) has instead shown signs of gradually instituting some sort of autocratic system. While opposition forces and civil society regularly advocate substantial democratization, it is unclear whether they themselves really embrace it.

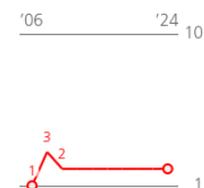
Civil rights

3



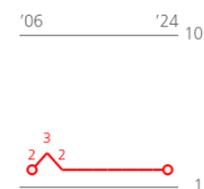
Performance of democratic institutions

2



Commitment to democratic institutions

2



5 | Political and Social Integration

Since the democratization process launched in April 1990, a still fragile party system has emerged. More than 600 political parties are registered in the DR Congo. Currently, only four of them – Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS), Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD), Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC), and Union pour la Nation Congolaise (UNC) – operate successfully at the national level. Many of the remaining parties operate in the capital city of Kinshasa, major cities throughout the country, or specific regions.

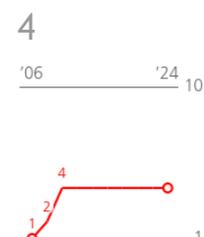
Most parties remain fragmented along ethnic, communal, and regional lines. In addition, the majority are highly personalized as they are led by ambitious individuals who use their parties as a springboard to launch a political career, a springboard they often hope will lead to being co-opted by the ruling party.

The system operates in the context of high voter volatility and therefore produces highly volatile alliances. After breaking its alliance with former President Kabila's Front Commun pour le Congo (FCC), President Tshisekedi, through patronage alliances, co-opted most elected officials into his new platform Union Sacrée pour la Nation (USN). In late 2022, this same platform started to collapse as some ministers and other elected officials loyal to Moïse Katumbi (who announced his presidential candidacy) quit the government.

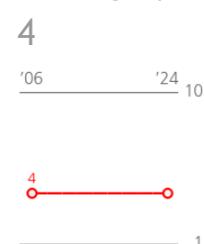
In the DR Congo, there is no formal party-financing scheme, therefore most parties depend on funding from party leaders or influential members. Often, these individuals utilize their positions in government or public enterprises to embezzle public funds in order to cover their parties' expenses.

The regime's total control of power seriously impairs the ability of individuals to organize into effective interest groups. Even when organized, these civic groups are usually unable to develop into a social force and successfully influence the country's political and economic priorities or policies. The groups with some limited influence are those that are notably supportive of the president such as the international business forum (Makutano) or those in which influential actors congregate such as the association of private investors and entrepreneurs (Federation of Enterprises in the Congo/FEC). Many employees, especially state ones such as professors, teachers and doctors, are organized into trade unions. Even though they are usually allowed to strike, their demands are almost only superficially taken into account. Social concerns are sometimes and very carefully voiced by the leaders of the dominant Christian churches such as the Catholic bishops.

Party system



Interest groups



There is no systematic empirical evidence of citizens' attitudes toward democratic norms; for instance, Afrobarometer does not conduct regular surveys in the country. However, the impressive level of participation in past general national elections in 2006, 2011, and 2018 and interest in political rallies could serve as a positive indicator. Some citizens' interest in a political alternative is often perceived as a reaction to the absolute social and economic misery they face, rather than their attitudes toward democratic norms. Compared to many neighboring countries, basic democratic convictions are held by large parts of the population.

Poverty and the low level of economic and social development, reinforced by the legacy of a decades-long cycle of still-ongoing violent conflicts, negatively affect the ability of Congolese to organize in ways that genuinely benefit their society. Associational life is existent and visible in the form of more than 5,000 registered NGOs. However, these associations rarely act for the common social benefit. They are often set up as means to receive funds for a few individuals' own benefit. The majority of the population often relies on the informal sector and subsistence agriculture to survive. Village communities, extended families, and women's local groups are the major frameworks of solidarity and self-organization, within which interpersonal trust appears to be high.

II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Many decades of wars, conflicts, poor governance, underinvestment, and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic have left the majority of the Congolese population in a state of absolute poverty, with very limited access to basic services. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the country has one of the largest infrastructure gaps in the world.

In the UNDP's latest Human Development Index update in 2021, the Democratic Republic of the Congo achieved an HDI value of 0.479 and was ranked 179 out of 191 evaluated countries and territories.

Despite a Gini coefficient of 42.1 (2012) and a GNI per capita of \$580 (2021), DR Congo has one of the world's greatest income inequalities. 64% of Congolese live below the absolute poverty line.

Partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 10% of household members in major cities, particularly in the capital Kinshasa, lost their jobs. Approximately 20% have reduced their food consumption due to increasing prices.

Approval of democracy

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Social capital

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Question Score

Socioeconomic barriers

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In the 2021 Gender Inequality Index (GII), a composite metric of gender inequality using reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market as primary dimensions, the Democratic Republic of the Congo ranks 151 out of 179 countries evaluated, with only 14.3% of women occupying parliamentary seats. While women's labor force participation is relatively high, at about 62%, women earn considerably less than men and own fewer assets.

Rural inhabitants form 52% of the overall population, yet only 29% of them have access to basic water. Only 31% of Congolese have access to sanitation, 21% of whom live in rural areas. Despite the country's significant hydroelectric potential, most of the population has no or limited access to electricity.

The state provides very limited services to the population and concentrates provision mostly in major cities, access to which is restricted to those few with connections to the most powerful individuals. Service delivery in most rural parts is largely nonexistent.

In general, the DR Congo continues to suffer social and economic disparities due, in large part, to incompetence in governance structures, a strongly embedded culture of corruption, and a lack of appropriate economic reform measures. When these measures are adopted, they usually go unimplemented.

For many Congolese, survival is ensured through subsistence farming (much of it currently limited due to ongoing instability) and informal small-scale trading. Churches and family members frequently provide social assistance. Poverty has little systematic relation to ethnicity or identity. Those with access to power – primarily controlled by the ruling presidential alliance, the affiliated economic elite, and in some cases by existing armed groups – live relatively comfortable lives. Women, who are increasingly becoming major providers for their families, continue to suffer rapes and violations of their civic rights, particularly in the war-torn regions.

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
GDP	\$ M	51775.8	48717.0	55351.0	58066.0
GDP growth	%	4.4	1.7	6.2	8.9
Inflation (CPI)	%	-	-	-	-
Unemployment	%	4.4	5.1	5.1	5.0
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	2.6	3.1	3.0	3.2
Export growth	%	1.4	8.0	8.2	18.9
Import growth	%	-15.3	12.0	43.6	24.9
Current account balance	\$ M	-1693.2	-1052.1	-587.4	-

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
Public debt	% of GDP	14.8	16.5	15.9	14.5
External debt	\$ M	7568.9	8161.2	10288.2	-
Total debt service	\$ M	1097.1	311.7	363.1	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	6.9	7.6	8.3	9.9
Public education spending	% of GDP	-	2.6	2.7	3.0
Public health spending	% of GDP	0.6	0.7	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.6

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Some measures toward privatization have been taken, although implementation was not truly effective. However, they do represent the government's intention to transition from a state-run economy to a market-oriented economy. However, progress remains exceedingly low and is severely obstructed by corruption, informal and nontransparent networks directly connected to the presidency (including government officials), the president's family, and close domestic and foreign allies.

Market-based competition is limited to only a handful of economic sectors. Given the low level of domestic production, the barriers to entry (as well as exit) for goods are exceptionally high, leading to exorbitant prices for imported goods. Consequently, foreign investment becomes notably expensive, along with the inherent risk of foreign investors being ousted from the competition by government-affiliated actors who can more readily engage in corrupt practices. Locally, the Congolese franc is predominantly utilized, competing with the highly favored U.S. dollar, which facilitates the majority of significant transactions.

The informal sector is large and accounts for 97.3% of the workforce, according to the most recent available data from 2012. The large informal sector is not so much a result of an extensively regulated market but rather a dysfunctional, unfair, and opaque institutional framework of economic policies, a high level of corruption and clientelism, as well as a general lack of infrastructure.

Market organization

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According to the Index of Economic Freedom by the Heritage Foundation, the DR Congo's economic freedom score is 47.9, making it the 157th freest economy in the 2023 Index. Its score was 0.3 points higher than the previous year. The DR Congo is ranked 40 out of 47 countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is significantly below the world and regional averages.

Historically, the Congolese economy was based on a number of large, monopolistic, parastatal structures. In order to modernize its outdated legislation on pricing and competition, the DR Congo introduced an organic law in 2018 that enshrined pricing freedom and competition, known as the Competition Act or Antitrust Act. The act addressed the deficiencies of previous laws by introducing more elaborate antitrust and merger control rules to tackle practices such as restricting access to the market by competitors, enabling businesses to carve up markets among themselves, fixing prices, hampering production, outlets, investments, or technical and technological advances, and skewing the outcome of a competitive bid.

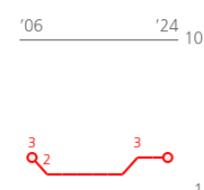
While the new law has enabled the rapid implementation of liberalization policies in some sectors, such as insurance, its general enforcement remains extremely weak. Even though there have been a considerable amount of private investments in the mining sector since 2007, the state continues to hold a monopoly in many other sectors, such as energy and water supply. Given the quasi-inexistence of effective state structures and the weak enforcement of the law, there are no safeguards against monopolies and cartels. These are typically associated with powerful individuals or groups with direct links to the president and his inner circle. Furthermore, access to investment and credit is highly politicized. Exceptions include the telecommunications and banking sectors, with a range of international companies operating nationwide.

The competition commission of the DR Congo signed a memorandum of understanding with the competition commission of the regional organization, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in April 2021, in order to enhance regulation and promote increased competition. The DR Congo, as an individual nation, is not a member of the International Competition Network, but COMESA is.

On paper, the DR Congo is committed to liberalizing its economy. The country has bilateral trade agreements with over 50 countries and belongs to several international and regional trade organizations, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (ECGLC), the Organization for Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA), and the East African Community (EAC). The Congolese government has set up and reorganized state agencies and taken more initiative to promote foreign trade. In 2022, the DR Congo deposited its instrument

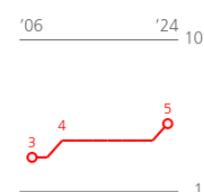
Competition policy

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Liberalization of foreign trade

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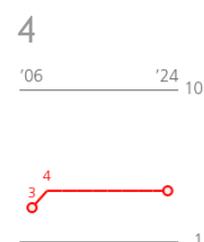
of ratification and became the 42nd country to ratify the continent-wide African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). By joining the EAC's body, it also joined the latter's free trade agreement. Although the Congolese government has made tremendous efforts to harmonize its system with regional trade bodies in the last two years, the implementation of the agreements and existing legislation remains very chaotic and mostly inconsistent. According to the Heritage Foundation's 2022 Index of Economic Freedom, the DR Congo scores 47.6, making its economy the 160th freest out of 177 countries evaluated. The country also ranked 40 among 47 countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages. Complicated legal and regulatory systems, limited access to credit, poor financial services, a generally low level of private-sector development, poor infrastructure, and systematic corruption pose difficulties for foreign investors and international trade.

The penetration of financial institutions in the DR Congo has been steadily improving during the period under review, but remains extremely low, while a considerable amount of commercial transactions continue to go through informal channels, which account for more than 80% of the money supplied. The DR Congo's banking system primarily consists of the Congolese central bank (BCC) and 18 commercial banks, along with a national insurance company (SONAS), the National Social Security Fund (CNSS), one financial development bank (SOFIDE), a savings fund (CADECO), approximately 21 microfinance institutions and 72 cooperatives, 81 money transfer institutions, and 48 foreign exchange offices. Due to the geographical and infrastructural constraints in the country, as well as many years of violence, many of these financial institutions encounter operational issues and have remained confined to major cities in a few of the 26 provinces. Although there are no restrictions on a foreigner's ability to establish a bank account in the DR Congo, the banking penetration rate stood at about 7.6%, representing about 5.3 million accounts, placing the country among the least banked nations in the world. Most bank accounts are used only to receive paychecks, which are typically withdrawn in full shortly after being deposited.

Data on non-performing loans and capital adequacy ratios were not available.

The political context, the weakness of the legal system, and the hostile business climate (higher operating costs and exchange rates) do not conform to international banking standards as defined in the Basel accords and do not encourage banks to provide long-term loans, despite the dire need for longer-term investment to finance the renovation and rehabilitation of the DR Congo's derelict industrial and agricultural sectors. Credit to private sector accounts is extremely scarce, accounting for about 3% of GDP. Banks usually charge higher interest fees, which are a major source of their revenues. The microfinance sector, which aims to support small-scale projects, is ineffective, inaccessible and largely nonexistent in many parts of the country, especially in rural areas.

Banking system



8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Although the 2014 central bank's (BCC) foreign exchange regulations declared the Congolese franc (CDF) as the main currency in all transactions within the DR Congo, the country's economy remained highly dollarized, and U.S. dollars are accepted as cash alongside the CDF in virtually all transactions. Real exchange rates stood at 119.3 in 2021 and 127.6 in 2020.

The country's constitution guarantees the BCC's independence. Its main responsibility is defining and implementing the country's monetary policy, and its main objective is to ensure the stability of the general level of prices.

However, as with many Congolese laws, the central bank's independence does not extend beyond the text. In practice, the bank is more or less under constant pressure from the president, who often discreetly withdraws cash for patronage when needed. The bank's monetary policy is fully aligned with the country's overall governance.

Throughout 2021, in order to balance elevated inflation against weak economic growth affected by the global ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the central bank held its monetary policy rate at an average of 8.50%. Inflation was better controlled, falling from 11.4% in 2020 to 9.3% in 2021, and price pressures continued to build over the remainder of 2022, with year-end inflation reaching 13.1% and starting 2023 at 14.7%. The central bank lowered its prime rate from 18.5% to 8.5% in 2021.

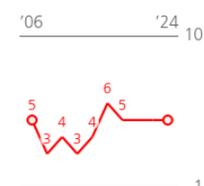
In general, due to the limited importance of financial institutions, a dominant informal sector, and a general dollarization of the economy, the monetary policy of the central bank has only limited influence on economic developments. Foreign exchange policy is essentially used for political purposes and is influenced by pressure from international donors.

Despite many challenges such as mismanagement by its leaders, spillovers from the Ukraine war, ongoing violence in the eastern regions, and the global economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government made significant efforts to align actual revenues reasonably with the budget that was enacted for the period under review.

However, there was some inconsistency and lack of transparency in the implementation of the government's fiscal and debt policies. Concerns about the reliability of information regarding expenditures to support executive offices, as well as the insufficiencies in civilian oversight of military and intelligence budgets, were never addressed. Budget documents did not include major sources of revenue and expenditure and lacked detail on allocations to and earnings from state-owned enterprises. Despite high current spending (salaries were exceeded by 10.9%), the

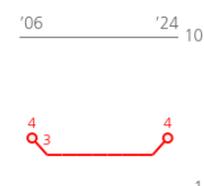
Monetary stability

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Fiscal stability

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39.3% increase in tax revenues – reflecting tax audits and penalties – lowered the budget deficit from 2.1% of GDP in 2020 to 1.5% in 2021. The 2023 elections are forecast to increase public spending and slightly widen the budget deficit from 1.6% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2023, before narrowing it to 2.3% of GDP in 2024.

National public debt remains moderate at 22.8% of GDP in 2021. The external public debt percentage of GDP dropped marginally from 66.3% in 2020 to 59.1% in 2021 and to 42.9% in 2022. The declining trend is expected to continue in 2023, with projections of 38.7% and 34.3% in 2024. The non-performing loan (NPL) ratio to total gross loans declined from 9.2% to 8.8% between 2020 and August 2021. The government expenditure-to-GDP ratio stood at 10.9% in 2020, is estimated at 14.8% in 2021 and 17.5% in 2022, and is projected to be 17.1% in 2023.

9 | Private Property

Property rights, even though stipulated in a highly complex manner, are explicitly recognized in the Congolese constitution (Chapter 2, Articles 34-40). The DR Congo is a signatory to several relevant agreements with international organizations, including the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

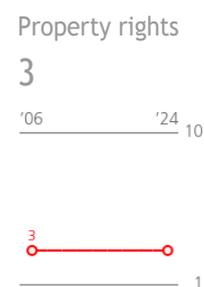
However, because of sustained corruption, a dysfunctional judicial system, and frequent administrative failures, these rights or the implementation of these agreements are either largely not observed or inconsistently enforced.

There are numerous expropriations of private property, particularly among individuals with direct connections to the president, his immediate family, and political and military elites. In 2022, the Catholic Church diocese of Kinshasa alleged the expropriation of its various land properties by officials or their relatives.

The state remains a major property owner of significant real estate and the country's land, and awards and validates property rights to private owners.

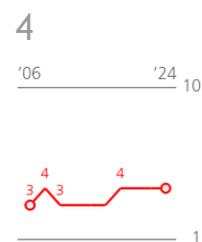
On the other hand, major infringements of these rights are directly linked to the government, its complex and obscure procedures, and the strong sense of entitlement amongst the country's elites. Almost every contract awarded either to exploit or own an important piece of land is likely to be revised by the next authority. Without resorting to the corruption of the country's elites for protection, many businesses in sectors such as mining face tremendous difficulties in operating freely.

According to the 2022 International Property Rights Index, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's score decreased by -0.575 to 2.886, placing it 28 out of 30 countries evaluated in Africa and 126 out of 129 countries evaluated in the world.



Through a major reorganization of some vital state agencies and a revision of certain legislation, the Congolese government has made significant reforms to improve its business environment and enable the free flow of private investment and the effective operation of private enterprises. The country's regulations explicitly allow for the promotion of foreign and domestic private investments, particularly in the form of private ownership. The state does not formally limit domestic or foreign private investments. In principle, existing private companies can operate freely. However, many constraints persist, such as difficult access to financing, a lack of basic infrastructure (such as energy, communication, and transport), excessive red tape, and occasional direct political interference. Although the Congolese National Investment Promotion Agency (ANAPI), through its "one-stop windows," has improved procedures for starting a business and has reduced the process to about seven working days, many local entrepreneurs still prefer to remain in the informal sector to avoid the large sums of money officials charge in the form of dubious or nonexistent taxes and fees. In the event of property seizure (often orchestrated by the country's elites) during operations, official channels are unable to provide the necessary support. Privatization processes, including involvement from international and private investors, are greatly hindered by rampant corruption and often result in acquisitions of semi-state-owned companies by individuals closely tied to the president's family or ruling elites.

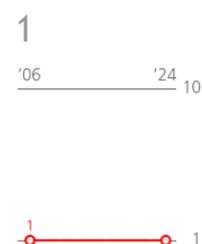
Private enterprise



10 | Welfare Regime

DR Congo lacks functioning state-sponsored safety nets. Firms are required to register with the National Social Security Fund (CNSS). However, the agency has been dysfunctional for over three decades, failing to adequately protect workers in the formal sector, which constitutes approximately 20% of the country's workforce.

Social safety nets



Subsistence agriculture – most of which is no longer possible due to continued violence – and the informal sector account for the living conditions of a significant percentage of the population.

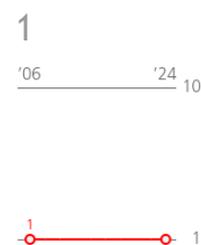
Employees, most of whom are state employees, are either poorly compensated or often go temporarily unpaid. Additionally, the majority of retired employees rarely receive their pension payments. Full access to the deficient services provided by the state health care system – a service provision that the government has failed to rectify – remains a luxury reserved for a select few Congolese citizens. The majority of Congolese people rely heavily on their family and community structures as the primary social foundation for survival.

In 2022, the United Nations estimated that 27 million Congolese, including 15.8 million children, were in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Churches and some domestic and international organizations provide social assistance, but due to the current humanitarian catastrophe in the DR Congo, these organizations are overwhelmed, often underfinanced, and only able to help a limited number of people.

Equal opportunity is enshrined in the Congolese constitution, but in the Congolese social reality, in practice it is almost nonexistent. Opportunities for social success, such as access to education, public office, or private employment, are highly dependent on the individual's personal or ethnic relations with the country's president, the president's family, the president's personal associates, and the country's high-ranking political and military officials. A merit-based system does not exist. There are no institutions to compensate for gross social inequalities or mechanisms to facilitate the social integration of disabled people or ethnic groups. Even though it is illegal, women and girls are discriminated against on all levels. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and regularly face sexual violence. Furthermore, the DR Congo is characterized by a deeply embedded patriarchal culture that includes laws and traditional customs that discriminate against women. While the female-to-male access to and completion of primary and secondary school have significantly improved in the last decade, female students accounted for only 31.2% of all students in tertiary education. In the 2021 Gender Inequality Index (GII) – a composite metric of gender inequality using reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market as the main dimensions – the DR Congo ranks 151 out of 179 countries evaluated, with only 14.3% of women occupying parliamentary seats. The DR Congo scores 0.576 and is ranked 151 out of 156 countries evaluated in the Global Gender Gap 2021 index.

Equal opportunity

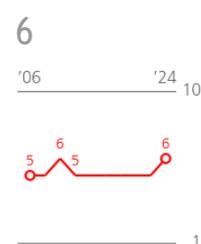


11 | Economic Performance

Despite the ongoing violence in the eastern region, the global consequences of the Ukraine conflict, and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's overall economic performance has registered significant improvements.

After a year of moderate growth in real GDP at 1.7% in 2020, the economy experienced a 5.7% expansion in 2021. This growth was primarily driven by major investments and high world prices in the mining sector, as well as sustained international assistance. In terms of per capita GDP, there was only a 2.5% increase in 2021, following a decline of -1.4% in 2020. It is estimated that the growth rate will accelerate to 6.3% in 2022. The rate of real GDP growth is expected to increase to an estimated 6.7% in 2023, before moderating to an estimated 6.5% in 2024. As of 2021, the official unemployment rate was 5.4%.

Output strength



The growth of non-extractive sectors went from a 1.3% contraction in 2020 to 3.3% growth in 2021, thanks to advancements in telecommunications, energy, and noncommercial services.

Despite high current spending (salaries were exceeded by 10.9%), the 39.3% increase in tax revenues – reflecting tax audits and penalties – lowered the budget deficit from 2.1% of GDP in 2020 to 1.5% in 2021. The 2023 elections are forecasted to increase public spending and slightly widen the budget deficit from 1.6% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2023 before narrowing to 2.3% of GDP in 2024.

National public debt remained moderate at 22.8% of GDP. The external public debt, as a percentage of GDP, decreased from 66.3% in 2020 to 59.1% in 2021, reaching 42.9%. This declining trend is expected to continue in 2023, with a projection of 38.7%, and again in 2024, with a projection of 34.3%.

The government expenditure to GDP ratio stood at 10.9% in 2020, is estimated at 14.8% in 2021 and 17.5% in 2022, and is projected to be 17.1% in 2023.

Even though the real GDP per capita has increased significantly in the last decade to \$524.7 in 2020 and \$577.2 in 2021, it is still very low compared to other countries in the West Africa and Central Africa regions.

Inflation was better controlled, falling from 11.4% in 2020 to 9.3% in 2021, and as price pressures continued to build over the remainder of 2022, year-end inflation reached 13.1%. At the start of 2023, it was 14.7%.

Foreign exchange reserves increased from \$709 million in 2020 to \$3.344 billion in 2021, partly due to the receipt of 50% of the \$1.52 billion SDR allocation, with the remainder being allocated to priority investments.

In general, the country's economic stability remains highly vulnerable to external factors, such as continued hikes in oil and food prices, as well as its high dependency on greater demands for commodities.

Challenges of any kind, but especially continued corruption, lack of consistent policy implementation, and widespread inappropriate management of the financial sector, remain causes for serious concern.

12 | Sustainability

The DR Congo has never developed a functional institutional framework or established suitable policies capable of protecting its rich (and one of earth's most precious) ecosystems.

The DR Congo has the world's second-largest rainforest, accounting for 18% of the planet's remaining tropical rainforest. The Congo Basin represents 70% of the African continent's plant cover and makes up a large portion of Africa's biodiversity with over 600 tree species and more than 10,000 animal species. The country's most important river, the Congo River, is the world's second-largest river by volume.

Environmental
policy

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country. Government expenditure on research and development was 0.41% of GDP in 2022.

The majority of elementary (71%) and secondary (63.8%) schools are run by private associations. About 80% of these private schools belong to the Catholic Church.

Starting in September 2019, in order to boost enrollment in the elementary school system, the government ambitiously made free primary schooling its flagship policy. As a result, the 2020 gross school enrollment ratio for primary education rose to 124% from an average of around 50% in the last decade, mostly due to older children joining schools.

Despite the government increasing the share of education in its voted budget from 11.6% in 2017 to 21.8% in 2021, as well as receiving a \$1 billion commitment from the World Bank to support its education policies, officials usually misuse the fund, a result of widespread corruption.

Teachers' salaries have not been regularly paid for years, and strikes are common at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. A lack of material and training programs for education personnel has become the norm and accounts for the extremely low quality of education and research and development in the DR Congo.

In general, education and R&D standards are very low and require more fundamental reforms to enhance and sustain the country's efforts for economic and social development.

Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

The structural constraints on governance in the DR Congo are very high and require a fundamental adjustment of the country's current governance approach.

Even though the country is known for its precious ecosystem, vast reserves of natural resources (such as diamonds, coltan, copper, cobalt, uranium, water and timber), structural constraints include a very low absolute level of socioeconomic development, severe poverty, a difficult political geography entailing a substantial territory with a thinly spread-out population and a near total lack of infrastructure (e.g., roads, railways, safe maritime passage). It also faces a lack of an adequate workforce, primarily a result of the absolute collapse of the educational system (with insufficient and unequipped graduates), a deeply embedded culture of clientelism, various burdensome legacies of decades of violent conflicts, the normalization of everyday violence in the conflict-ridden parts of the country, and the total absence of popular trust in institutions and state agents.

The country is heavily affected by malaria and is regularly hit by pandemics of yellow fever (especially in isolated regions), by Ebola, and by COVID-19.

There is a vibrant civil society tradition in the DR Congo, which has its roots in the anti-Mobutu activism of the 1990s. During the National Conference in the early 1990s, civil society groups, including women's and student associations, human rights groups, and professionals, as well as church leaders, actively influenced the negotiations and made determined efforts to oust Mobutu from power. Since then, civil society has been more effectively organized compared to other countries in the region. Despite a deteriorating political and social climate, numerous active NGOs exist. However, civil society has been impacted by decades of war, the militarization of social life, and state-endorsed suppression of dissenting voices. Many organizations that emerged from the anti-Mobutu activism have become increasingly politicized and focused on specific issues. They reflect broader structural dynamics, such as ethnic divisions, exclusionary strategies, organizational and management weaknesses, as well as reliance on the regime's patronage system and international funding. In certain regions and during periods of heightened international attention, NGOs tend to proliferate in order to secure funds and address issues deemed relevant by the global media. Consequently, international donor programs do not always exert a positive influence on the otherwise relatively independent civil society tradition in the DR Congo.

Structural
constraints

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Civil society
traditions

6



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Nonetheless, courageous civil society groups are currently engaged in a wide range of activities at the grassroots level, even in the most conflict-ridden and dangerous regions. Because any fundamental criticism of the regime usually results in a hostile response from the government, other civilian organizations, including churches, typically avoid interference and instead focus on low-profile social issues. While several civil society organizations seem to have grown weary, youth movements (Lucha and Veranda Mutsanga especially) continue to vocally denounce the inaction of the government and the U.N. forces of MONUSCO. In general, civil society lacks capacity and relies fully on either domestic patronage or external support to carry out its activities.

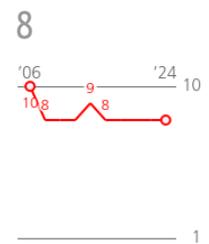
Given decades of authoritarian rule and violent conflict, social trust has its limits, especially among antagonistic ethnic and regional identity groups. However, village communities, extended families, and women's local groups serve as the primary frameworks of solidarity and self-organization, where interpersonal trust seems to be strong.

Important parts of eastern Congo are riddled with ethnic and regional conflicts, where since the early 1990s armed conflict has become almost a normality. Various armed groups – Congolese, foreign-backed or entirely foreign forces – form a constant threat to populations in large parts of North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, and Ituri. Conflicting parties are various armed groups, but mainly the Rwandan-backed M23, the Congolese-based Rwandan rebel group FDLR, and the Congolese-based Ugandan Islamic rebel group ADF-Nalu. The Congolese national army, the FARDC, can, in many of its actions, be better considered a conflict party among other rebel groups than a tool for fostering peace. Alliances among these armed/rebel groups and between rebels and the FARDC shift frequently.

The U.N. MONUSCO mission is mandated to protect the civilian population but has thus far had a mixed record and repeatedly comes under criticism for inefficiency. Mostly dormant until November 2021, M23 stepped up its attacks on the Congolese army, forcing thousands of civilians to flee the violence. In 2022, many rural cities in North Kivu, such as Bunagana, Kiwanja and Kishishe, were the scene of regular deadly combats and completely fell under the control of the rebel movement M23, forcing the displacement and death of many civilians.

Following the 2022 negotiations and agreements of Luanda (aligned with the Nairobi agreement), the East African Community members assembled and deployed in the DR Congo a special intervention brigade tasked to support the FARDC in order to actively neutralize armed groups. Societal fault lines correspond to ethnic and regional affiliation, while conflict issues include access to resources, land and perceptions of discrimination along ethnic lines. Economic motives are becoming increasingly dominant. Armed conflicts in the DR Congo have historically been greatly influenced by developments in neighboring countries and the international economy. They are however increasingly exacerbated by the availability of natural resources and the porosity of borders, especially in the eastern region.

Conflict intensity



In general, decades of armed conflicts have normalized violence and militarized most communities, especially in the eastern region. Even though a larger proportion of the population does not engage in political and social conflicts, for some, violence has become the only solution.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The government lacks the capacity and suitable personnel to formulate (and implement) an appropriate plan of action able to kickstart the country's social, economic and political course of development. Given the country's natural assets, it is fair to argue that the country's leadership has no intention whatsoever to promote the collective well-being of the Congolese people.

At the same time, there have been some signs of efforts being made in this regard. At the beginning of his term, President Tshisekedi announced a 100-day program in which he outlined his priorities, which include infrastructural development projects such as road construction and refurbishing facilities for drinking water and electricity, as well as his intent to prioritize education and health care services.

In December 2019, the Congolese government also released the new National Strategic Development Plan (Plan National Stratégique de Développement, PNSD), targeting the development of human resources, the strengthening of good governance and peace, economic growth, infrastructure development, and environmental protection for the period between 2019 and 2023.

Most recently, President Tshisekedi has reformulated and presented his plan as the development plan for the DR Congo's 145 territorial districts (PDL-145 T).

While the government claimed it would ensure that these projects receive rapid financing, to date, only a few of them have been fully completed. Corruption and the systematic looting of allocated funds are to blame.

In general, whenever the government, as was the case with previous governments, develops a prestige plan such as the PDL-145 T, which includes infrastructural projects, it is often a calculated strategic move to attract funds from the IMF, the World Bank and international donors.

Question
Score

Prioritization

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Given that the government's intention to promote sustainable development is often little more than lip service, the will to implement respective policies is also frequently limited. Reform-oriented officials in the government, administration and security apparatus face many difficulties in implementing the state's strategic priorities. Implementation in the review period is mostly limited to some infrastructural prestige projects like the 100 Day program or the PDL-145 T project covering DR Congo's 145 territorial districts, both of which seek to demonstrate progress on the president's economic development plan. To date, very few infrastructure projects have reached completion. Instead, many of the officials involved in their implementation have been arrested and tried for embezzlement of allocated funds. Most priority reforms of the current administration, such as providing free elementary education, and improving the country's security apparatus and justice system, have seen little progress, owing mostly to officials' incompetence and widespread acts of corruption at most levels of administration. Apart from a lack of political will by the most powerful elites, structural constraints such as the unsuitability of skilled personnel in certain strategic positions and inappropriate budgets are hampering the implementation of even the most basic measures, making success dependent to a large extent on donor support.

In 2021 and 2022, the government occasionally executed short-term policies (often financial regulations and adjustments) to retain the cooperation of the IMF, the World Bank and some international donors. In general, the country's current officials do not show a strict commitment to policy implementation to promote and preserve constitutional democracy, live up to its social responsibility, and effectively enhance an ecologically sustainable market economy.

The policymaking process in the DR Congo has always been complex and often inefficient. There are always many established informal policymakers around the president, who are usually more influential than the prime minister and the government. In general, there is no such thing as setting up serious commissions tasked with studying the government's failures. Failed policies are rarely corrected. They are simply not discussed further. For instance, during 2021 and 2022, government funds were wasted on the (re)construction of a few roads, which remain in substandard condition. In Kinshasa, there were cases of constructions suffering collapses following the first heavy rains, which resulted in a change of the construction company (the tender often being won by companies with direct links to political or military elites) without thorough investigations into the previous recipient of the tender. Similar mistakes occur in the mining sector, whereby contracts are signed and then annulled by the next minister. In addition, the country's academics are neglected. Their inputs are only considered valuable when they contribute to consolidating the regime's power. In general, there has been scant policy learning concerning either socioeconomic issues or the security sector. Since colonial times, the governing style has been characterized by the implementation of short-term priorities and the personal enrichment of political and military elites who address policy failures only under pressure from international partners. Conclusions of

Implementation

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Policy learning

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investigations into such policy failures have not been heeded with any thoroughness but rather followed just enough to appease the international critics; as a result, the solutions are short-lived.

15 | Resource Efficiency

Successive Congolese governments, and especially the current one, are notoriously known for wasting the smallest amount of human, financial and organizational capital. Fundamental problems include poor revenue collection, corruption by revenue-collection services, tax evasion, politically motivated dismissals or new appointments of public servants, unfair recruiting procedures subject to systematic corruption, political meddling and an oversized security apparatus.

Mechanisms to raise the efficiency of the bureaucratic administration of human and financial resources, including monitoring, evaluation, and auditing procedures, are nonexistent. The reinvigoration of the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) and the prosecution of public officials who have embezzled money have so far done little to help, as arrested officials are often released after only a few months.

Only a minority of graduates, often those with personal connections to the country's elites, have been given the opportunity to replace individuals in the aging public workforce.

Budget planning and implementation are rarely transparent. Non-discretionary spending is high, raising suspicions that parallel budgets exist to finance the personal goals of the political and military elites.

For any costly project, the state relies almost exclusively on foreign aid. Provincial administrations have to date very little financial autonomy and are in the vast majority of cases unable to freely or effectively spend their scant resources.

In the DR Congo, power, policymaking and coordination are fully concentrated in the presidency. The other state structures (national or provincial, executive, legislative or judiciary) are simply expected to act in a way that supports the president's decisions. Different branches of the government often compete against each other, with counter-productive effects. Public officials' responsibilities often overlap with one another, be it between different levels of the administration (e.g., national and provincial officeholders) or between the formal government and the president's powerful advisers. The results are uncertainty, for example with regard to property or business deals, and a general bias in decision-making toward the will of the highest bidder. The confusing situation frequently leaves room for rivalries and politicking but still allows President Tshisekedi to retain control as the ultimate arbiter. Nonetheless, coordination between relevant bodies concerning the goal to keep President Tshisekedi in office (presidency, parliament, relevant ministries, security forces and even the judiciary) is remarkably effective.

Efficient use of assets

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Policy coordination

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Despite the existence of anti-corruption laws in the DR Congo, President Tshisekedi making the fight against corruption one of his top priorities, and despite subsequently reinvigorating the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) and publicly supporting the independence of the justice system, rampant corruption in all political, economic and social sectors remains one of the DR Congo's key problems. There is constant political interference in economic and financial matters as well as an almost total lack of transparency in governmental decisions and accountability, including public procurement. Auditing and expenditure tracking is often the exception. Cases of apparent high-level corruption and dubious deals investigated by the IGF or sometimes reported by international or civil society organizations have had no visible consequences for those implicated. Officials are sometimes arrested, judged, and even imprisoned, but then released after a few months. Absolute impunity for public officeholders prevails. The media and civil society organizations are sometimes reluctant to report cases of corruption for fear of reprisals. However, it would be mistaken to blame rampant corruption solely on the government. The code of conduct involving the public sector, private sector and civil society is meant to guide formal and informal private companies that conduct business in the DR Congo and to promote integrity, good governance, respect and transparency. However, the code is mere lip service and is not effectively implemented. For many large companies, the high costs of corruption are still lower than the costs of a truly integral and ethical practice of business. Since the main goal in Congolese politics is to gain access to resources, politics does not aim at preventing corruption but in fact facilitating it. Implementation of an anti-corruption policy cannot be expected in this context.

Anti-corruption policy

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16 | Consensus-Building

Among Congolese political actors, there is no sincere consensus on democracy as a strategic long-term goal. Instead, the government, the political opposition, and even most rebel groups pay lip service to democracy to primarily further specific, personal and, at times, anti-democratic objectives.

Nevertheless, democratic institutions continue to be important. All relevant players are aware of the fact that a democratic regime with regular elections and conventional institutions (e.g., a constitution, separation of powers) is the only means to retain at least some internal and external legitimacy, which is necessary given the country's dependence on international support.

However, the tradition of holding national dialogues in politically deadlocked situations, such as the current situation involving the processes and choices of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), bypassing elected institutions, which are typically perceived as partisan and fully supportive of the presidential camp, contradicts democratic processes and lacks full constitutional legitimacy. Since these dialogues serve as a mere tool for "elite recycling" without a direct popular mandate, it can be argued that they undermine democratic processes, despite their consensus-driven nature of decision-making.

Consensus on goals

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Overall, the most important long-term consideration of the current administration appears to be the consolidation of its hold on power.

To date, the government has failed to develop significant sustainable economic policies capable of generating revenues and creating jobs for a majority of the population. The actions of political actors, both inside and outside of government, do not indicate a deep commitment to these goals, despite occasional suggestions to the contrary in their rhetoric.

Mainly as a result of consistent international pressure, the government has shown a market tendency. However, this tendency may take some time to fully materialize. Most elites may block such developments, as this could limit their access to resources. This has largely been the case to date.

Primarily as a result of consistent international pressure from partners such as the World Bank, IMF, and AfDB, the government has shown a tendency toward market-based principles. However, the high level of corruption in DR Congo suggests that the political elites are only interested in a liberal market economy as long as it benefits their own interests.

There is, however, a broad consensus on obvious goals for a least-developed country. All political actors rhetorically pursue economic development, infrastructural development, education, and health care. The government has translated this into a multitude of respective programs, such as the 100 Day Project, DR Congo's 145 territorial districts (PDL-145 T), poverty reduction strategies, and free elementary education, among others. These programs have not been effectively implemented, and in some cases not at all, since there was only a rhetorical consensus on the basic goals but no clear framework on how to put them into practice.

In the DR Congo, the distinction between democratic reformers and anti-democratic veto actors is blurred. Among all competing groups (government and the opposition, civil society and military), there is evidence of anti-democratic elements. Given the sometimes authoritarian, clientelist approach of the current administration, the elites in the military and politics have effectively established themselves as the country's major anti-reform veto actors. In most cases, many superficial reform-oriented actors become co-opted by the ruling elite. Some parts of the country are alternately governed by rebel groups and/or the military for a certain period of time, effectively undermining any democratization process. Last but not least, national and foreign economic actors and companies – most importantly those involved in the mining sector – repeatedly undermine democratization processes, fostering armed conflicts and corruption while engaging in, or at least tolerating, human rights abuses for business interests.

Anti-democratic actors

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Even though the current administration maintains a conciliatory tone emphasizing the country's ethnic diversity and calls for national unity, no measure has been thoroughly implemented to address existing divisions or prevent cleavage-based conflicts from escalating. The main cleavages continue to run along ethnic and regional lines. For many decades, ethnic-based arguments and the “protection of community interests” have entered the Congolese political discourse. In fact, ethnicity has become a political bargaining chip that many political actors use to position themselves. Political elites manipulate and even exacerbate existing tensions to shore up their own power. This has been the case with the ongoing violence in the eastern areas of Kasai and Mai-Ndombe, where national elites have frequently aggravated ethnic tensions in tandem with local allies. Ad-hoc mechanisms, such as political dialogues, which often result in the distribution of political positions at every level of government, have shown that political cleavages can at least partially be overcome. However, such mechanisms used for conflict resolution fall outside the constitutional framework. Unfortunately, civil society organizations are subject to the same cleavages as society at large, and they often pursue personal and divisive aims. Courageous civil society activists, such as local women's groups, that try to depolarize social conflicts, expose themselves to harassment and attacks of various forms, especially in those parts of the country affected by violent conflicts between different communities. In general, ethnic cleavages are strengthened and upheld by political actors who use ethnic conflicts as vehicles for their political ambitions.

In the DR Congo, the perspectives of civil society in political decision-making are often disregarded. Elected parliamentarians seldom return to consult their constituents after relocating to Kinshasa. When opposing views surface, differing fundamentally from the regime's direction, they are frequently met with harsh reprisals. Recent instances involving activists from groups like Filimbi or Lucha exemplify this trend. Civil society primarily engages in political processes through specific institutions at particular junctures. This was evident during the Sovereign National Conference of the early 1990s, the Sun City Peace Talks of the early 2000s, the national dialogues of 2013 and 2016, and the most recent “national concertation” under President Tshisekedi, which served as the launchpad for his present political coalition, known as the Union Sacrée. Additionally, civil society is regularly consulted during the creation or assessment of specialized government programs, such as those aimed at poverty reduction. In these instances, civil society's involvement is notably robust in terms of participant numbers and recommendations, especially when international pressure is intense. However, the overall influence has consistently remained limited, and decisions largely continue to rest with political elites. The establishment of the CENI in 2013, presided over by representatives from civil society, was intended to foster participation. Yet, a significant hurdle to effective civilian engagement lies in the hidden motives of leaders within civil society organizations. These leaders often assume such roles to advance their personal political agendas. Once absorbed into the ruling faction or offered influential political positions, they tend to disregard their organizations entirely.

Cleavage / conflict management

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Public consultation

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Reconciliation between perpetrators and victims of past and ongoing injustices, as well as justice for victims, remains essential to bringing a sustainable end to violence. However, the country's political leadership and governments have, to date, failed to invest any effective effort in this area. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in 2003 as a result of the 2002 peace agreement never engaged in any activity. Rather than promoting reconciliation and justice, particularly in the ethnically divided eastern parts of the country, politicians often leverage existing tensions for their own benefit.

In February 2020, 121 civil society groups issued a joint statement in which they criticized President Tshisekedi for not sending a sufficiently strong signal of his willingness to fight impunity for serious human rights violations and foster reconciliation.

The government has also remained very selective with regard to the call to prosecute some former warlords through the International Criminal Court (ICC). At the same time, other criminals have enjoyed protection and continue to hold high-level positions in, for example, the national army.

17 | International Cooperation

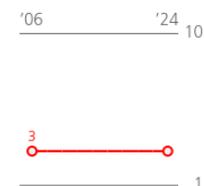
The current Congolese administration has made tremendous efforts to improve cooperation with international partners, whose assistance is much needed for the country's many development projects. However, the country's officials continue to falter in devising a consistent long-term strategy capable of integrating this assistance effectively. In most cases, the provided support fund is usually diverted into the personal coffers of the country's political and military elites.

The government usually accepts most of the requirements of international donors to allow a rapid release of their assistance, which is often used for short-term expenses. Government projects such as those in President Tshisekedi's Programme de 100 Jours or P-145 T have not progressed beyond the document stage.

In general, the government has not shown strong signs that it has deeply understood the country's problems and is able to devise a viable long-term development strategy to address them. Criticisms of its handling of affairs, even mild criticism, are often denounced as infringing on the country's sovereignty. As a result, even though efforts are being made to show progress in handling the much-needed international assistance, the overall relationship with international partners remains ambiguous.

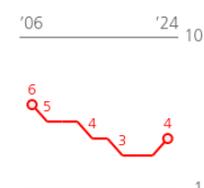
Reconciliation

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Effective use of support

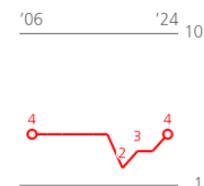
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In stark contrast to his predecessor, President Tshisekedi is reengaging with the international community and trying to rebuild trust with DR Congo's international partners. The government's approach is to present itself as a credible and reliable partner. While much of the working relationship with crucial partners such as the World Bank and IMF has been restored, most international partners are growing increasingly frustrated with the government's mishandling of the country's affairs. The channels of governmental decision-making remain extremely opaque. The many centers of power do not share a common vision on policies and priorities for the country's political and economic development. The elite's widespread impunity, officials' endemic corruption, and the systematic looting of the country's funds are among the greatest barriers to restoring trust and credibility in the government. For example, on September 22, 2020, during a visit to the Equateur Province, ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States quickly realized that the Ebola pandemic had created a business since the Congolese officials' striking mismanagement of funds through over-invoicing the level of need was apparent. These practices were noticeable in almost every other project such as free elementary schooling, where officials have exorbitantly multiplied the prices of required items to loot the projects' funds. Transparency in the mining sector also poses serious challenges. DR Congo is forced to adhere to various international and regional transparency initiatives in order to uphold its credibility as an international partner, but so far this has had little impact on decision-making concerning the exploitation of the country's vast riches in natural resources. Most Western donors hold the perception that the Congolese leaders are not open to advice in any form but are instead willing to receive the maximum possible financial assistance available. For instance, the U.S. State Department reported for the year 2021 that authorities rarely investigated, prosecuted, or punished those who were responsible for human rights abuses, particularly those at higher levels.

Credibility

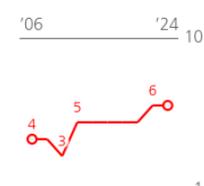
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Since 2019, DR Congo has embarked on a significant overhaul of its foreign policy and objectives. President Tshisekedi's policy shift stands out for its notable international and continental activism, seeking to put an end to DR Congo's diplomatic isolation, which it had faced since 2016. Tshisekedi sought to restart cooperation with several key partners and revitalize the country's role in international organizations and regional economic communities. As a result, the DR Congo revitalized and harmonized its engagement with the South African Development Community (SADC), the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Central African Economic Council (CAEC). The DR Congo also joined the Eastern African Community (EAC). These efforts led to the DR Congo assuming various organizations' chairmanships, such as the AU and SADC. However, behind these efforts to restore DR Congo's standing internationally are renewed accusations of aggression against its eastern neighbors, especially Rwanda. Relations with Rwanda have historically been tense. Kigali has always accused Kinshasa of failing to counter

Regional cooperation

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– or even cooperating with – the Rwandan FDLR militia, whereas the DR Congo government blames Rwanda for the latter’s repeated support of armed groups in the regions of North and South Kivu and for illegally exploiting DR Congo’s mineral resources. Both accusations by DR Congo are proven by recent U.N. reports. President Tshisekedi had succeeded in harmonizing relations with Rwanda and President Kagame, forging different working partnerships and military cooperation in order to combat negative forces operating in the eastern Congo, as well as enhancing economic development in the region. However, recent developments seem to have renewed old tensions. Congolese government accusations, supported by U.N. reports, the European Union, France, Germany, Belgium and the United States are that the Rwanda Defense Force is backing the M23 rebel group. In 2022 and early 2023, many rural cities in the eastern province of North Kivu fell under the control of the rebel movement M23. Rwanda in turn continued to claim its right of defense, especially against the FDLR group, which they accused of working within the FARDC. In general, even though the improved relations with Rwanda seemed to have rapidly unraveled, the current administration’s efforts have been to restore DR Congo’s international standing.

Strategic Outlook

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is sub-Saharan Africa's largest and one of its poorest countries. Despite ongoing violence in the eastern region, internal political volatility, global consequences of the Ukraine war, and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's policy reforms targeting fiscal and financial supervision under an extended credit facility with the IMF have resulted in overall economic growth for the period under review (January 2021 – January 2023).

After a year of moderate real GDP growth of 1.7% in 2020, the economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021. Driven primarily by significant investments and high global mining sector prices, this growth also benefited from sustained international assistance. A further accelerated growth of approximately 6.3% is recorded for 2022. Real GDP growth is expected to increase even further, reaching an estimated 6.7% in 2023, before moderating to an estimated 6.5% in 2024.

Non-extractive sectors, including telecommunications, energy, and non-commercial services, went from a 1.3% contraction in 2020 to a growth of 3.3% in 2021. Despite high current spending (salaries exceeded by 10.9%), the budget deficit improved from 2.1% of GDP in 2020 to 1.5% in 2021, thanks to a 39.3% increase in tax revenues resulting from tax audits and penalties.

Looking ahead, the 2023 elections are projected to increase public spending and slightly widen the budget deficit from 1.6% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2023, before it gradually falls to 2.3% of GDP in 2024.

This positive economic performance did not, however, have a significant impact on the lives of the Congolese population, the majority of whom continued to live on less than \$2.15 a day.

The challenging working relationship between President Tshisekedi and former President Kabila's political movement meant President Tshisekedi decided to co-opt the majority of elected officials into his newly created presidential majority movement Union Sacrée pour la Nation (USN).

In 2023, being constitutionally a national election year, the Congolese political arena is becoming increasingly unstable. Some officials are abandoning President Tshisekedi's Union Sacrée to position themselves as a presidential candidate or to join other coalitions to challenge the president. If held under the current conditions, it is highly likely that President Tshisekedi and his political coalition will win and extend their dominance.

Despite the multiple challenges he has faced during his current term, President Tshisekedi remains a popular figure among the electorate. In a mid-2022 opinion poll by Target SARL, a DR Congo-based pollster, 30% of respondents said they would vote for the president in the next election. Even though opposition parties are likely to be given more political space than previously to stage their campaigns, President Tshisekedi is most likely to be declared the winner. The CENI and the Constitutional Court are headed by his allies. He has consolidated his support within the military. To date, the resurgence of violence in the eastern parts of the country has not really affected his poll lead nor increased the popular support for his potential challengers.

No major change is foreseeable after the upcoming 2023 general elections. Even though the IMF, World Bank, and international partners continue to pressure the government to promote a market economy, there is still a high level of state intervention, and the state retains an absolute monopoly in various sectors of the economy. Complex and often conflicting centers of power, unprofessional public officials, human rights abuses, and widespread corruption at all levels of government significantly impede political and economic development. Without a doubt, numerous problems persistently hinder the country. It may require an even longer period to devise genuinely sustainable solutions. These solutions will need to consider many factors, but the following are crucial: a systematic anti-corruption campaign (the IGF alone, under its current form, cannot address the problems throughout the entire country), the long overdue reform of the security sector (to establish a reliable army and police force capable of monopolizing violence), stronger promotion of an independent justice system, financial empowerment of the 26 provinces (to ensure rapid developmental work reaches all corners of the country), a reconciliation campaign (to foster social cohesion), and increased investment in education, training, research, and development.