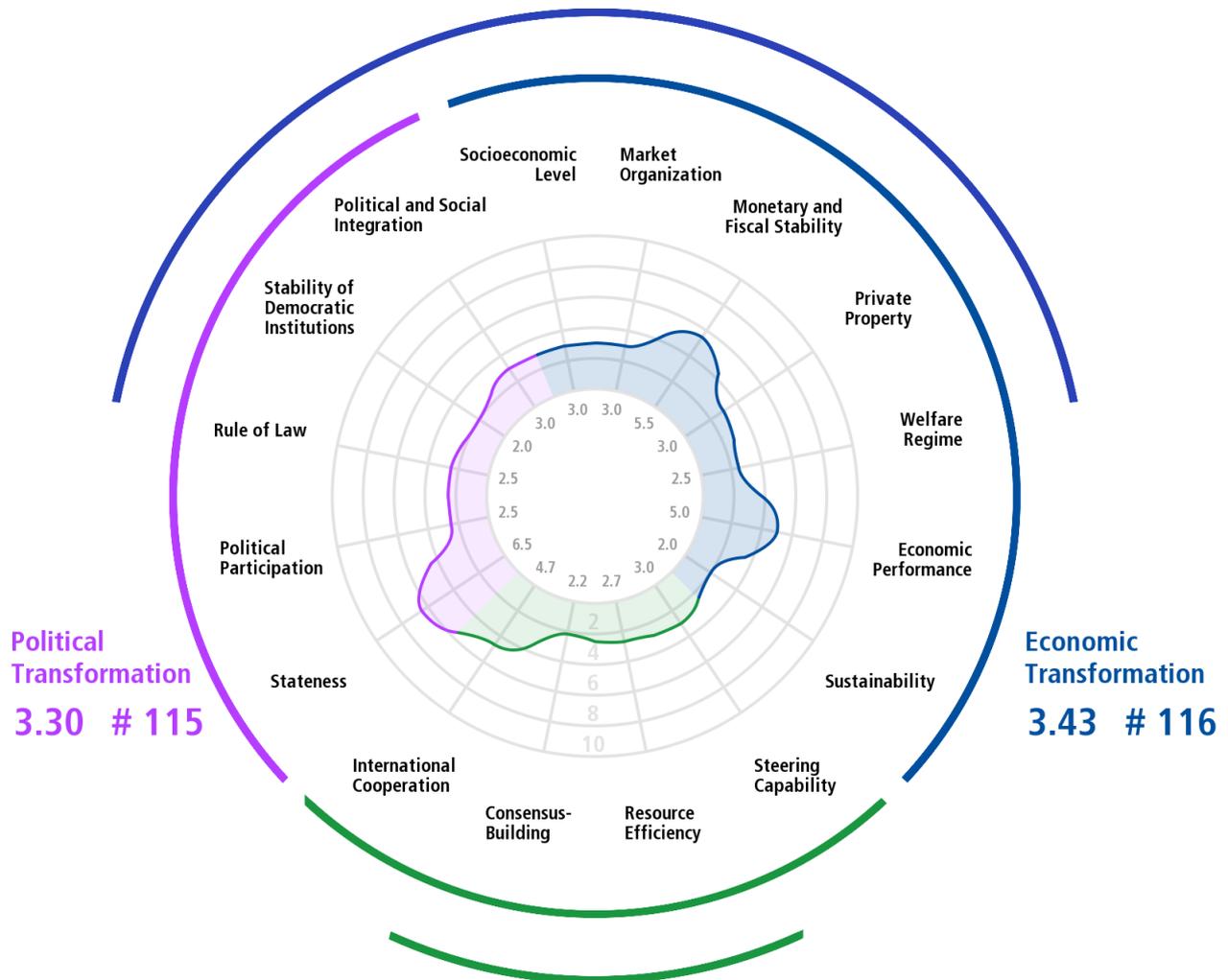


Congo, Rep.

Status Index

3.36 # 119

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
3.30 # 115

Economic Transformation
3.43 # 116

Governance Index

2.93 # 123

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2020**. It covers the period from February 1, 2017 to January 31, 2019. 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	5.2	HDI	0.608	GDP p.c., PPP \$	5652
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.6	HDI rank of 189	138	Gini Index	48.9
Life expectancy	years	64.0	UN Education Index	0.539	Poverty ³	% 61.3
Urban population	%	66.9	Gender inequality ²	0.579	Aid per capita \$	21.1

Sources (as of December 2019): The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2019 | UNDP, Human Development Report 2019. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.20 a day at 2011 international prices.

Executive Summary

During the period under review, the transformation of the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) has been marked by the continuation of the reign of President Denis Sassou Nguesso, dependence on oil rents, rampant corruption, and limited economic diversification and social development. The increase in oil production beginning at the start of 2017 has stabilized GDP growth, but non-oil sectors remain in recession. The majority of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture and the informal economy, and therefore receives little real benefit from oil rents. Rather, these revenues are largely siphoned off by state elites and Sassou Nguesso's family. The June 2017 arrest in France of the president's daughter on charges of money laundering and misusing state resources is the latest prominent example of the state-driven corruption that dominates the republic's economy.

Sassou Nguesso has been emboldened by recent referendum and electoral successes (2015, 2016 and 2017) to limit transparency in the key oil and timber sectors, while thoroughly suppressing political opposition. For instance, opposition leader Andre Okombi Salissa's arrest in 2017 and the 2018 sentencing of General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko to 20-years imprisonment illustrate the regime's continued efforts to silence opposition, civil society activists and journalists. Accusations of human rights abuses and deaths while in state custody have served to draw attention to the regime's harsh tactics, although with little real consequence. Widespread repression and self-censorship have remained the norm in the Republic of Congo, with individuals or organizations perceived to be overly critical by the regime often arrested or disbanded.

The unstable sociopolitical climate during the review period is best represented by the conflict in the region of Pool. The conflict began in response to the April 2016 burning of a government building in the buildup to Sassou Nguesso's inauguration and ceased in December 2017, with disarmament following in August 2018. Ostensibly against the defunct Ninja militia led by Pasteur Ntoumi, the conflict was a focused government campaign on Pool, a region near Brazzaville, which largely targeted southern ethnic Lari in what has widely be seen as an effort by the regime

to reinforce its rule and suppress potential opposition. The campaign resulted in thousands of casualties (a lack of access by outside observers makes precise reporting impossible), 138,000 displaced people, and the burning and looting of homes and villages. The resulting humanitarian crisis has yet to be addressed adequately by the government, with domestic and international NGOs largely orchestrating what aid has been provided.

In all, given improved oil revenues and a re-emboldened stranglehold on power, Sassou Nguesso has demonstrated little real willingness to transition to an effective democracy or market economy. IMF and World Bank pressure has proven largely ineffective under current circumstances, and the country's increasingly vocal civil society organizations remain largely powerless against the regime's interests. Further diversification and greater transparency are vital to the long-term interests of the republic's economy and population, but policies to this end remain limited due to the sustained network of corruption and clientelism that shapes the distribution of resources. Urban-centered, ineffective infrastructural and utility projects often fail to address the basic needs of the majority of the population, with rural areas in particular constrained by the inadequate distribution of state resources. This is echoed in the education and training of the population, which further hinders the domestic economy and bureaucratic structures under the country's autocratic regime.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The political and economic transformation of the Republic of Congo began in the early 1990s. Domestic and external pressures combined to force the self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist government of Denis Sassou Nguesso, in power since 1979, to take steps toward major political and economic change. His regime officially renounced its Marxist-Leninist ideology and introduced a multiparty system in 1991, abolishing the one-party rule of the Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT). By this point, the government under Sassou Nguesso had brought a modicum of stability to the country, which had faced two decades of political instability, including military coups and political murders, following its independence from France in 1960. Ethnic rivalries, social and regional disparities, and mounting power struggles over the control of oil, the country's main export, were all responsible for the trouble.

Under these circumstances, transformation became an extremely conflict-ridden affair, inciting power struggles, political violence and civil war; this led to the considerable infrastructural damage, serious disruption of the economy and hardship for many people.

In the 1992 to 1993 elections, Sassou Nguesso and the PCT lost power to a coalition led by Pascal Lissouba and his Union Panafricaine pour la Démocratie Sociale (UPADS). After a brief bloody civil war, Sassou Nguesso returned to power in 1997, owing to support from Angola and France. Thereafter, ethno-regional militias waged war against his authoritarian regime, with Pool (the region around Brazzaville) becoming the most prominent theater of violence. In the end, the militias were forced by the regime's military might to accept peace. Based on a new multiparty

constitution, the president and his PCT-led coalition “organized” their victory in the 2002 elections. In 2003 and 2007, the regime was able to impose peace agreements on the Pool militia, which was headed by a Pentecostal military commander known as Pasteur Ntoumi.

Acting within a corruption-prone political system, Sassou Nguesso has been able to gain victories in each election since 2007. With its carrot-and-stick approach, in which oil revenues and the threat of military force are employed, the regime has successfully integrated “moderate” opposition politicians and erstwhile enemies into its system. From 2007, Sassou Nguesso has been able to coopt several erstwhile opponents, including the Mouvement Congolais pour la Démocratie et le Développement Intégral (MCDDI), which is based primarily in Brazzaville and Pool. The death of several prominent opposition leaders, including MCDDI leader Bernard Kolélas in 2009, strengthened the regime.

When the president’s second, and constitutionally last, term approached its end, the sociopolitical basis of the regime started to erode, with, most prominently, the MCDDI leaving the ruling coalition in 2015. At the end of 2013, the president faced a serious violent challenge led by a former close ally, Lieutenant Colonel Marcel Ntsourou, whose troops were defeated in a brief bloody gun battle in Brazzaville. The officer, a key figure in Sassou Nguesso’s return to power in 1997, was held responsible for a March 2012 arms depot explosion, which caused almost 300 casualties.

Finally, the president forced through drastic measures that enable him to retain power. For example, the president succeeded in winning a controversial October 2015 referendum that allows for his re-election, although the result was overshadowed by protests and state repression. Thereafter, Sassou Nguesso prevailed in the March 2016 presidential election, winning 60% of the vote. The political opposition coalesced into two umbrella groups, FROCAD and IDC, before they later merged. In the 2016 election, the opposition groups fielded a surprisingly high five candidates. Faced with brutal violence by the regime, the mass protests that accompanied the 2015 referendum, 2016 presidential election and 2017 legislative elections failed to fundamentally change Sassou Nguesso’s hold on power.

In April 2016, just before Sassou Nguesso’s inauguration, frustrated citizens set a government building on fire. In response, the government launched a military campaign ostensibly against the disbanded Ninja militia headed by Pasteur Ntoumi. This campaign targeted ethnic Lari and was designed to deter future political opposition. A state of emergency was declared, and internet and SMS communications were cut as the government launched airstrikes and undertook a sustained military operation in Pool. NGOs were largely refused access, so the number of casualties (in the thousands) cannot be precisely calculated. Though 138,000 people were displaced, and immeasurable damage was caused to homes and villages, which has created a dire humanitarian crisis. Opposition figures, such as General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2018, have been detained and tortured. The same has been true of the government’s actions toward activists and journalists. A ceasefire was agreed in December 2017, with disarmament following in August 2018.

With the political system still in the grip of the Sassou Nguesso regime, the transformation of the country's economy, dominated by oil exports, from a highly state-interventionist system to a more market-oriented system have been thwarted by the leverage of strong vested interests of the state elite, as well as the conflicts delineated above. Feeling the need to look for economic stabilization after the defeat of the Pool militia (2003), the government reluctantly subordinated its policies to IMF conditionality by two mid-term loan arrangements in 2004 and 2008. Massive debt relief, mediated by the IMF and World Bank in 2010, provided some financial reprieve for the country, though debt has again increased in recent years. Transformation toward a socially and ecologically balanced market economy has been sluggish, while poverty and unemployment have challenged the political and economic stability of the country.

When the 2008 loan agreement with the IMF expired in 2011, the government, emboldened by high oil revenue from 2010 to 2014 and Chinese loans, elected to continue without formal follow-up IMF backing. From mid-2014, however, the economy came under severe stress, as global oil demand and prices suffered a downturn, meaning a heavy slump in exports and state revenue. With the need for economic and export diversification more evident than ever, the Republic of Congo elected, along with other CEMAC countries, to approach the IMF for support. However, oil production and revenue increased from early 2017 and throughout much of the review period, which has increased revenue and stabilized GDP growth, allowing the government to again ignore calls for further diversification and greater transparency. The lack of genuine diversification and transparency has allowed corruption and clientelism to flourish under Sassou Nguesso, while non-oil sectors continue to contract and the population suffers under the weight of decades of ethno-regional conflict and minimal reinvestment toward developmental goals.

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

As in previous reports, the government's monopoly on the use of force is largely intact throughout the territory in principle, as guaranteed most recently by the 2015 constitution. Nonetheless, there remain distinct enclaves in which this authority has continuously been challenged.

Most notably, the government's crackdown and offensive in the region of Pool, purportedly against the Ninja rebel group, has eased, although humanitarian concerns remain. Though the violent outbreak in this long-unstable region, which followed the 2016 re-election of Sassou Nguesso, began to calm in 2018, Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have pointed to the regime's detention and torture of opposition figures without due cause as particular areas of concern, which call into question the legitimacy of the regime's actions.

In addition to Pool and the effects of the conflict therein, there are legitimate concerns of spillover effects from the continuous conflict in both Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the latter the most pressing concern amidst increasing threats of upheaval following the election of Félix Tshisekedi. Immediately following the result in DR Congo, opposition figures, the Catholic Church, and other countries have called for a recount amidst numerous irregularities. It remains to be seen what the result will be, but such electoral contestation is frequently a cause for increased violence, repression and conflict. The territorial instability currently represented by the DR Congo's potential for worsened conflict has continuously been accompanied by incursions by rebel forces into the territory of the Republic of Congo and prompted further deployment of U.S. troops to Gabon in January 2019.

Furthermore, the two main cities of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire remain notorious for petty and violent crime, with specific neighborhoods (e.g., Bacongo and Moundali) often identified as areas of especially high crime.

Despite these various threats to the state's monopoly on the use of force, the Sassou Nguesso regime has continuously demonstrated its ability, and zeal, for silencing opposition figures and quelling resistance before it is able to pose a genuine threat.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

6

'06 '20 10



1

The constitution guarantees full citizenship rights to every person born in the Republic of Congo. There are, however, systemic constraints which hinder the full exercise of rights for certain sections of the population. Specifically, members of Denis Sassou Nguesso's northern Mbochi ethnic group control most positions of power, while Kongo, Teke and Sangha groups are marginally represented, and indigenous and Pygmy peoples are not represented at all. Though steps have been taken in this decade (i.e., 2011) to improve their position in society, Pygmy populations in the Republic of Congo remain limited in the operation of their rights given their low literacy rates and the difficulty of accessing resources in many rural areas. Women are also under-represented, representing only around 20% of elected officials.

Beyond such systemic constraints, the military and police forces have increasingly come to be dominated by Sassou Nguesso loyalists originating from his home region of Cuvette. The concentration and centralization of authority, and appointment of ethno-regional loyalists has been a conscious effort by Sassou Nguesso to minimize the perceivable influence of opposition forces. However, this has naturally had the effect of marginalizing other groups and thereby limited the legitimacy of the state under Sassou Nguesso.

Though the country is highly Christianized, the state is constitutionally and functionally secular. Most elites are Catholic, but there remains a distinct separation, and prohibition, on the interference of religious dogma in political functions.

Precise demographic data are largely unavailable, but a substantial majority (up to 90%) of the population are Christian (Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal), with 2% to 3% Muslim and the remainder animists. Those practicing traditional African religions are primarily located in rural areas, although many frequently migrate. As such, this group may have seen a recent growth resulting from the migration from people from Pool to the rural hinterlands.

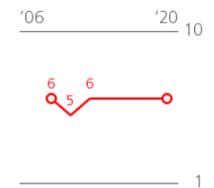
Nonetheless, the Republic of Congo is recognized as one of the states in Africa in which discrimination or conflict based on religion is nearly nonexistent. Regional differences are much more potent sources of favoritism and conflict.

Despite highly centralized attempts to expand the state's reach over its entire population, its efforts have continuously been hampered by high-level corruption, ethno-regional rivalries and disparities, low administrative capabilities and a bloated public sector, and the spillover effects of conflict.

As time has passed, Sassou Nguesso has gradually integrated a larger proportion of individuals from his home region of Cuvette into public administration. This has contributed to resources being primarily focused in that region as well as the key urban centers of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. Although the government has established administrative services in regional capitals as well, it routinely underinvests in public goods, especially in rural areas.

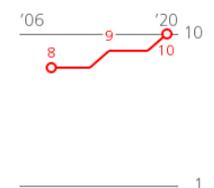
State identity

6



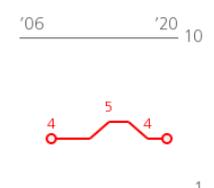
No interference of religious dogmas

10



Basic administration

4



Following the government's crackdown on the region of Pool, access to resources, aid and other services have been very slow to recover, with humanitarian agencies decrying the conditions into which this area's inhabitants are returning. Furthermore, only 15% of the population have access to improved sanitation facilities, while 24%, and as high as 60% in rural areas, lack access to clean water.

2 | Political Participation

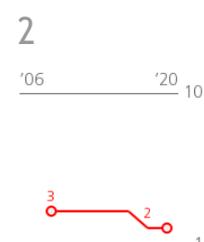
With the exception of a five-year period between 1992 and 1997, Sassou Nguesso has been in power since 1979, and has used force and ethno-regional favoritism to maintain power and control. As such, each election held to re-elect Sassou Nguesso, most recently in 2016, has been marred by inconsistencies, claims of fraud and crackdowns on opposition figures. Though free and fair elections with universal suffrage are guaranteed by the constitution, the reality is that the current regime is more an autocracy than a democracy, with ministerial and cabinet positions similarly disproportionately distributed and elections typically followed by protests and violent crackdowns in the major urban centers of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire in particular. In the most recent (2017) legislative elections, Sassou Nguesso's PCT and its allies gained 108 out of 151 seats, with low turnout and allegations of fraud accompanied by the suspension of election processes in the nine districts of Pool.

With the frequent and unlawful arrest of opposition figures (e.g., Paulin Makaya of the UPC party) and the constraints on political party registration serving to restrict the number and success of opposition parties, elections in the Republic of Congo are far from free and fair. Opposition parties often claim turnout is far lower than the figures quoted by the regime and international monitors are frequently denied access, demonstrating the illegitimacy and lack of transparency common under Sassou Nguesso's reign. Humanitarian groups have further challenged the regime's treatment of opposition figures while in detention, pointing to clear cases of torture and frivolous lengthening of sentences as evidence of the regime's at-times brutal attempts to silence opposition.

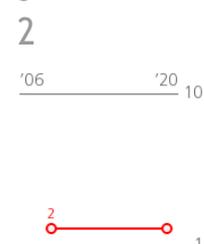
Having regained power through civil war, Sassou Nguesso's reign has always lacked the degree of legitimacy, or oversight, necessary to effectively govern. Having never been elected to office, and having subsequently maintained control through fraudulent elections, there is virtually no democratic legitimacy to the Sassou Nguesso regime. Furthermore, given the high degree of corruption, centralization, and ethno-regional favoritism of the regime and military, there are no clear veto powers capable of constraining the increasingly autocratic Sassou Nguesso. Landowners are either largely subordinated or loyal to Sassou Nguesso, and while Catholic clergymen recently attempted to challenge the electoral and military actions of the regime this came to nothing.

Amidst this lack of legitimacy and veto powers, Sassou Nguesso has proven relatively capable of maintaining stability and effectively governing the territory, with the

Free and fair elections



Effective power to govern



exception of the now-cooling conflict in Pool, and the enclaves facing spillover effects from Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There are important parties in the form of the IMF, France and China, which together form the most potent external economic powers in the country. France, the former colonial metropole, has long been the key economic partner of the Congolese, though China has for the past few decades, and increasingly in recent years, provided an interesting counterbalance to French influence. Specifically, increasing cooperation and infrastructural development projects have allowed China to gain significant influence within the Sassou Nguesso regime. These powers, due to the economic gravity of their relationship with the Republic of Congo, provide perhaps the most potent veto power to Sassou Nguesso's activities.

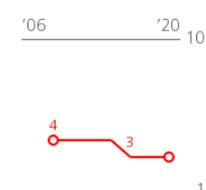
Nonetheless, there has been limited progress in dismantling the corrupt patrimonial structures which dominate the Congolese economy and politics, with Sassou Nguesso's recent rhetoric failing to truly undermine corrupt practices, particularly in the oil sector. The illegitimate distribution of resources evident therein is symptomatic of the illegitimate, opaque governance operationalized by the regime and the minimal impact of voters' intentions on policy or structures.

Freedoms of assembly and speech have been codified, most recently in the 2015 constitution, and guarantee all citizens freedoms of expression and association. In practice, however, the regime continues to ignore these rights, as it arbitrarily arrests, and violently responds to protests, strikes and organizations that challenge the Sassou Nguesso regime. In terms of political association, there is theoretically an allowance for the formation of political parties in line with specific ideologies or interests. However, in practice, political parties with any measure of influence are largely organized along ethno-regional lines. The regime faces accusations of arbitrarily rejecting some opposition political parties' applications for registration. In addition to apparent efforts to narrow the field of opposition, there have been consistent accusations of the arbitrary arrest and torture of significant opposition figures, with the obvious goal being to maintain Sassou Nguesso's network of authority.

Beyond the elite level, targeting of citizens, be they workers or protesters, has been pervasive in the regime's efforts to maintain stability. Violent clashes with and arrests of protesters following elections have plagued each of the recent presidential and legislative elections in 2016 and 2017, with angry opposition met by an authoritative, forceful government response. Such crackdowns on opposition are further represented by the conflict in Pool, which followed the burning of a government building by supposed militants. Around 138,000 civilians have been displaced as a result of the violent government crackdown.

Regarding labor, organizations friendly to the Sassou Nguesso regime are often the recipients of favorable treatment with respect to trade and labor disputes, with the interests of trade unions and other labor organizations often overshadowed by the outcome that most benefits Sassou Nguesso's patrimonial network. Further, the arrest

Association /
assembly rights
3



of striking workers and labor protesters, as well as leaders and journalists, mirrors the government's overall policy of suppressing opposition and ensuring the attainment of its own priorities.

The freedom of expression is codified in the constitution for all citizens, political and civil society organizations, and the mass media, including online media. In practice, however, the government rarely respects such rights when it comes to criticism of the regime. This was prominently illustrated by the arrest in January 2017 of Ghys Fortuné Dombé Bemba, editor of *Talassa*, for publishing a statement from a former Pool rebel leader. Bemba was eventually released in July 2018.

Such flagrant rejections of a free press and free expression have been consistently employed to silence opposition voices. Self-censorship is common among journalists, while opposition leaders – such as Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, a former presidential candidate and general, who was sentenced to 20-years imprisonment in 2018 for “undermining internal state security” – are arbitrarily and routinely arrested along with supporters or protesters who openly challenge the regime's authority.

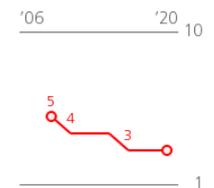
3 | Rule of Law

A system of checks and balances on the presidency, legislative and judicial branches, and the media exists and was codified in the 2002 and 2015 constitutions. However, the separation of powers, and checks and balances exists only on paper. The judiciary, congress and media are effectively controlled by Sassou Nguesso or those in his inner circle, ensuring all decision-making is centralized within the presidency. No mechanism exists to legally remove the president from office. The Constitutional Court and other courts, and the legislative primarily reaffirm the regime's decisions, while media sources – such as the Sassou Nguesso-owned *Dépêches de Brazzaville* or the government-run *Radiodiffusion Télévision Congolaise (RTC)* – continue to serve as propaganda machines for the regime.

With the 2015 constitutional changes (e.g., raising the maximum presidential age and extending presidential term limits from two seven-year terms to three five-year terms), Sassou Nguesso manufactured in 2016 a reaffirmation of his mandate, and has sought to tighten his grasp on power and ensure the survival of his reign. With such autocratic tendencies promulgating throughout the regime's activities and structures, those branches capable of serving as a check on the regime's power are crippled by a dependence on and loyalty to Sassou Nguesso.

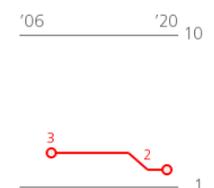
Freedom of expression

3



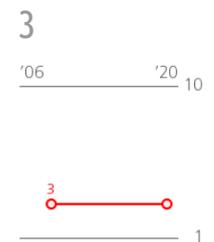
Separation of powers

2



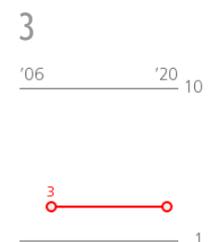
In principle, an independent judiciary is codified in the 2015 constitution. In practice, the courts are hindered by political alignments with Sassou Nguesso. The Constitutional Court and other high-level courts have long been dominated by political judgements such as those against key opposition leaders in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Beyond its political functions, there is a degree of decentralization to the court system, particularly in rural areas, which has resulted in the dilution and limitation of available resources, and the overburdening of many of the lower courts. Corruption and weak administrative capabilities add to this troubled system and further inhibit the effective functioning of an independent judiciary.

Independent judiciary



The Republic of Congo ranks among the world's 20 most-corrupt countries and is ridden by a lack of transparency alongside the exploitation of vast natural resources. Though regime's rhetoric, aimed largely at achieving an IMF bailout prior to the recent upturn in oil revenues, had indicated a renewed interest in dismantling the corrupt structures that dominate the Republic of Congo's economic and political systems, there has been no real progress made toward improving the situation. The recent stabilization in GDP growth resulting from increased oil production and revenues has largely enabled the continuation of this corrupt network at the expense of the Republic of Congo's non-oil sectors.

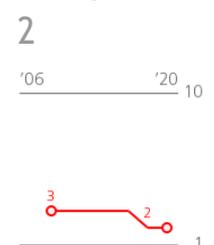
Prosecution of office abuse



Much of the corruption, which has starved the country of resources, has been practiced by Sassou Nguesso and those closest to him, and prevents a dependent judiciary or legislature from acting against any individuals of particular significance. As such, beyond certain low-level scapegoats or opposition figures, there is little evidence of effective legal punishment for corruption or similar practices, despite being officially punishable under the constitution. There is increasing public pressure on the regime to tackle the rampant corruption, however, with Catholic bishops, for instance, attributing the high levels of debt and the worsening of the Republic of Congo's economic fortunes in 2018 to the negative effects of uncontrolled corruption on trade deals, revenue and resource distribution.

Though the regime has a de jure and rhetorical commitment to the protection and elevation of human rights for all of its citizens, in practice these priorities are often overshadowed by efforts to suppress any voices opposed to the regime. This was evident in the violent protests surrounding the 2015 constitutional changes and 2016 presidential election in particular, as well as the brutal crackdown on the region of Pool. The crackdown on Pool largely targeted ethnic Lari and only recently came to a conclusion. Arbitrary arrest, torture and deaths in police custody are common.

Civil rights



Sassou Nguesso occasionally employs xenophobic rhetoric, particularly against migrant Africans, to fuel suspicion, and justify violent police and military actions in certain areas. Women, children and ethnic minorities (particularly non-Bantu pygmies) are at particular threat of violence, rape and forced labor, with government-linked groups demonstrably ignoring human rights concerns. Such abuses are accompanied by impunity for security service personnel, leading to a lack of

accountability, and a lack of respect for the most basic civil and human rights by the regime. The displacement of people from Pool is the most recent example of a consistent pattern of overt violence by the regime, irrespective of civilian casualties, with the aim of suppressing any opposition to Sassou Nguesso's reign. Displacements of local populations are not uncommon and have impacted drastically the basic livelihoods of Congolese.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Despite stable structures, institutionalized democratic institutions, and a separation of the executive, judiciary and legislature in principle, the Sassou Nguesso is de facto an authoritarian regime. Constitutional changes in the 2015 referendum solely served to provide Sassou Nguesso with an extended mandate and immunity from domestic prosecution, rather than representing the democratic will of the people. Crackdowns beginning in 2015 and continuing through 2018 illustrate the regime's prioritization of its own survival and the suppression of opposition, with little avenue for recourse on behalf of the citizenry.

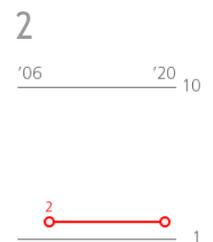
Given the clearly authoritarian nature of the Sassou Nguesso regime, key actors' commitment to democratic institutions is nearly non-existent. With immunity from domestic prosecution, a rejection of the International Criminal Court, and a clear willingness to respond to dissent with violence and arbitrary detention, Sassou Nguesso and those close to him exercise strict control over the political, economic and social functions of the Republic of Congo. Within this environment, citizens and civil society groups have few, if any, avenues for challenging or shaping the regime's activities.

5 | Political and Social Integration

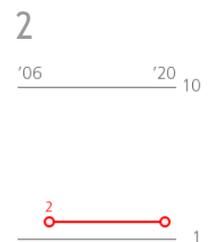
Though 1990 saw a transition toward multiparty democracy and the formation of over 100 parties, many of these are either inactive or have been co-opted by the ruling PCT. Opposition to the regime is most notably provided by UPADS, founded by the ousted Pascal Lissouba. Parties' membership and interests, however, are highly regionalized, shaped by ethnic loyalties and aimed primarily at elevating the position of a specific section of society. As such, national parties or coalitions fail to represent national interests and are often crippled by the domination of Sassou Nguesso's PCT over both houses of the legislature, as well as the executive and judiciary.

As support is highly regionalized and based on ethnic loyalties, clientelism plagues the system and state repression results in weak, internally divided opposition parties or coalitions, which have continuously failed to unseat the regime. These issues make for a highly unstable, ineffective party system in which the former single-party state continues to be dominated by the PCT and coalition partners loyal to Sassou Nguesso.

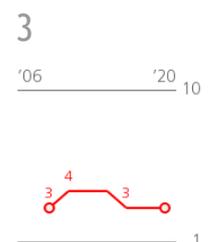
Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



Party system



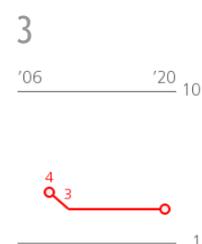
Though interest groups and civil society organizations exist and function to a certain degree in the Republic of Congo, their activities at the national level are shaped by a dependence on the support of the regime. The arrest of key trade union leaders and activists has prompted unions such as the CSTC and CSC to seek “social truces” with the regime in exchange for short-term dividends. Though unions effectively address narrow concerns, clientelism and government oppression have significantly hindered the implementation of labor priorities, such as promised salary increases for government employees. The concerns of women, minorities and other groups at particular risk of abuse remain largely unrepresented at the national level.

With the recent economic instability prompted by fluctuating oil revenues, the leadership of the Catholic Church has been a key actor in challenging the regime, which has called for increased transparency and a crackdown on corruption within key sectors. The Congolese Observatory of Human Rights (OCDH) has in recent years offered itself as a valuable monitor as well, but with violent crackdowns on protests and strikes, as well as the conflict in Pool, little real progress has been made in terms of improving the regime’s accountability to such organizations. Pressure from CSOs, the IMF, World Bank and European Union to improve accountability and transparency has been limited and has failed to have any real impact on the approach of the Sassou Nguesso regime.

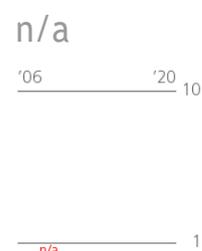
As in previous review periods, there remains no available data on citizens’ views on or approval of democratic institutions. However, with non-official voter turnout estimates as low as 15%, opposition forces and external monitors have frequently questioned the citizenry’s participation in these institutions. Though official turnout typically approaches 70%, the high reported rates of abstention seem credible given the manufactured nature of the Republic of Congo’s elections. Nonetheless, abstention and lack of civilian involvement should not suggest a lack of desire for such institutions, with frequent protests and challenges to the Sassou Nguesso regime indicating a desire for the installation of true multi-party competition.

The Republic of Congo’s legacy of state repression and political violence has typically stymied efforts at self-organization and stoked distrust among the citizenry, particularly along a north-south divide. This ethno-regional divide, mirroring the 1997 civil war, has largely hindered the functioning of any national-level citizen groups. However, given the localized nature of most peoples’ lives, and the level of involvement in the informal economy or subsistence agriculture, groupings (e.g., family and community structures, and women’s and minority groups) have served as an important form of self-organization. Trust within such groups of aligned interest is relatively high, but such forms of inter-personal trust are largely nonexistent on the national stage. With Sassou Nguesso’s promotion of his co-ethnic Cuvette regionals, actors in high-level positions are often loyal to the regime, rather than the population or specific underrepresented sectors.

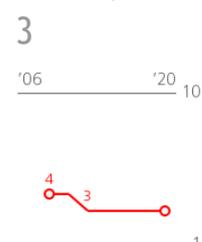
Interest groups



Approval of democracy



Social capital



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

As has been the case in previous review periods, the Republic of Congo continues to rely heavily on its oil sector for government revenue. Meanwhile, the majority of the population remains dependent on subsistence agriculture or the informal economy, with 37% of the population employed in the shrinking agricultural sector. Total unemployment remains around 11%, while youth unemployment is 22.5%.

Though oil remains a vital aspect of the Republic of Congo's economy, the decline in global prices in mid-2014 prompted a rapid decline in government revenues, with more than \$1 billion worth of cuts in the subsequent period. Increased production in 2017 and 2018, however, has served to temporarily offset this volatility. Public debt approached 120% of GDP in 2017 and only declined slightly to 83% of GDP in 2018. Importantly, the addition of non-oil mineral products, most notably iron ore, should serve to offset the weakening oil market in due time.

According to the U.N. Human Development Reports, the Republic of Congo attained an HDI score of 0.606 and ranked 137 out of 189 countries. Due to the clientelism that surrounds the government and key mineral sectors, the revenues generated from minerals provide little real benefit to the citizenry. Unsurprisingly, inequality remains a serious problem for the Republic of Congo, with a Gini coefficient of 48.9 and an overall loss in HDI of 22.6% due to inequality. In the Gender Inequality Index, the Republic of Congo scored 0.578.

Despite decades of rapid urbanization and migration to the southern areas around Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, more than a third of the population still lives in rural areas. A shrinking agricultural sector added to an emphasis on non-labor-intensive mineral and industrial sectors has generated a poverty rate around 50%. Given the lack of transparency and high flows of capital in the oil sector, the Republic of Congo has for decades witnessed the concentration of revenues and resources within a small group of elites. These elites are often closely connected to Sassou Nguesso and enjoy significant wealth, while the majority of the population has struggled to overcome the systematic limitations such resource-dependence and corruption creates.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

3

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3

1

Economic indicators		2015	2016	2017	2018
GDP	\$ M	8553.2	9035.8	8701.3	11263.7
GDP growth	%	2.6	-2.8	-3.1	1.0
Inflation (CPI)	%	3.2	3.2	0.5	-
Unemployment	%	9.8	9.7	10.2	10.4
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	50.0	0.6	50.6	38.3
Export growth	%	-4.5	-2.0	12.6	22.0
Import growth	%	-6.0	-9.0	-41.6	1.6
Current account balance	\$ M	-4628.7	-3593.6	-	-
Public debt	% of GDP	102.9	118.6	117.5	87.9
External debt	\$ M	4022.4	3758.3	4926.2	5147.3
Total debt service	\$ M	226.9	148.9	228.0	294.4
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-12.2	-6.8	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	17.7	15.1	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	18.1	17.6	11.6	8.3
Public education spending	% of GDP	4.6	-	-	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.6	2	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	-	6.4	4.3	2.5

Sources (as of December 2019): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

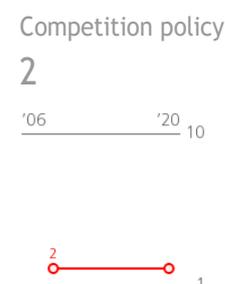
7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

As has often been the case during times of economic crunch in the Republic of Congo, the government under Sassou Nguesso has in recent years sought to assure creditors, most notably the IMF, through its rhetoric that it is making serious strides in tackling the pervasive corruption in its economy. Nonetheless, despite some scapegoat cases, this rhetoric has yet to come to fruition. The continued dominance of key state-owned enterprises (SOEs) alongside intricate patron-client networks within the extractive industries more generally has ensured a lack of genuine competition or freedom in the market.

Despite some progress in market openness and trade liberalization, the Heritage Foundation's 2018 Index of Economic Freedom has given the Republic of Congo a score of 38.9, ranking it 177 out of 180 countries. In general, though trade freedom and openness have improved, a weak judiciary, high taxation and government spending, as well as over-regulation have contributed to a decline in the Republic of Congo's level of economic freedom. Limited reform of the SOEs and a general lack of transparency within Sassou Nguesso's inner circle of elites have allowed corrupt practices to continue despite superficial efforts at dismantling this system.

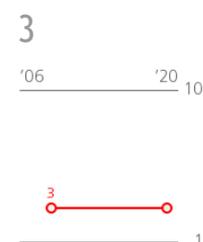
A large proportion of the population is forced to work in the informal economy, which accounts for more than 81.5% of total employment. The main sectors of the informal economy are food trade and agribusiness, which accounts for most of the private sector growth in the Republic of Congo. Weak infrastructure, particularly in electricity and internet, as well as low education standards hinder the development of the Republic of Congo's economy. In the World Bank's 2019 Ease of Doing Business report, the Republic of Congo scored 39.83, far below the regional average of 51.61, with a rank of 180 out of 190 countries. Starting a business in the Republic of Congo takes 49 days and 10 procedures, with a cost of 40.5% of GNI per capita. For starting a business, the republic scored 64.1 out of 100 and ranked 179 out of 190 countries. The World Bank in its report echoes many of the issues considered above. A lack of transparency in SOEs and utilities, as well as the monopolization further constrain the Republic of Congo's development and prevent the growth of a genuine private sector.

As in previous review periods, there is no information regarding anti-monopoly or anti-trust legislation. In practice, there is clear evidence of state-run monopolies in key "strategic" sectors, most notably oil. In Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2018 profile on the Republic of Congo, the republic scored zero out of four for both safeguards against corruption and transparency, with Sassou Nguesso's patrimonial network dominating the domestic economy. For instance, Sassou Nguesso's daughter was arrested in June 2017 in France for laundering money derived from the country's oil revenues. It is widely acknowledged that the Republic of Congo's economy is constrained by the corrupt, opaque practices of the regime and key SOEs, which prevent any genuine competition or the formation of a functioning domestic private sector.



Foreign trade is vital to the Congolese economy, with exports and imports equaling 138.6% of GDP. Despite the clear importance of trade, however, true liberalization has been slow at best. Though the Heritage Foundation noted an improvement in trade freedom in 2018, average tariffs of 11.6% added to significant nontariff barriers to limit overall foreign investment. The Republic of Congo ranked 184 out of 190 in terms of the World Bank's Doing Business trade across borders score, with border compliance and customs procedures in particular identified as being costly to trade and investment. Private and foreign investment flows are insufficient, with FDI standing at 25.6% of GDP, while private capital flows were negative at -43.4% of GDP, representing a troubling loss to the domestic market. The simple average MFN applied tariff was 11.4% in 2016.

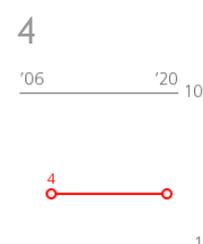
Liberalization of foreign trade



The Republic of Congo became a member of OPEC in June 2018, granting it input into future pricing and further integrating this vital sector into the global market. Despite rhetorically committing to trade liberalization, particularly in the face of sustained low oil prices, foreign trade remains largely in the hands of elites close to the regime and Sassou Nguesso. Important infrastructural improvements (e.g., computerization, electricity and internet) have been slow to develop, which further hinders foreign trade and investment. The already much-discussed system of corruption, which underlies much of the Republic of Congo's economy, ensures a general lack of efficiency and transparency, further compounding the general difficulty in foreign economic interactions with the Republic of Congo.

The number of private banks has grown in recent years. The number of commercial banks active in the country barely exceeds 10, however. Of these, several are in the hands of foreign interests, namely French or Moroccan interests, as well as members of the Sassou Nguesso family, as is the case with BGFIBank Congo.

Banking system



There is no stock market, while monetary policy is determined by the Central Bank of the Central African States (BEAC), within the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) framework. Banking penetration is typically estimated at below 10%, with excess costs and widespread poverty narrowing the pool of customers. The latest (2017) bank capital to assets ratio stood at 17.2%. Meanwhile, nonperforming bank loans stood at only 12%. Apparently, the low oil price took its toll on the banking sector.

In all, given the underdevelopment of the financial and banking sector, combined with endemic corruption and lack of transparency, the Republic of Congo's banking system lags well behind its peers. High intermediation costs, high collateral requirements and excess liquidity are among the key factors that constrain the Republic of Congo's banking and financial sectors. Though there has been noted progress in microfinance, particularly in rural areas, and in electronic banking.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

As a member of the CFA franc zone and CEMAC, the Republic of Congo's monetary policy is largely shaped by foreign actors, specifically CEMAC's central bank, BEAC and the European Union. Such institutions control the rate and exchange of currency in the Republic of Congo, generating a degree of stability and predictability, despite occasional political conflicts. Nonetheless, inflation has fluctuated regularly throughout the past decade, ranging from 7.5% in 2009 to 0.4% in 2010 to 6.1% in 2012 and to below 2% in 2018.

Following the financial crisis in the aftermath of mid-2014 decline in oil prices, the government was pressured by the IMF to adopt certain anti-inflationary and austerity policies. Real progress to this end has been limited, however, by the growth in revenue beginning in 2017 as well as the rampant corruption and clientelism which hinders any genuine liberalization or reform. Due to its CEMAC membership, most monetary policy is not determined or prioritized domestically.

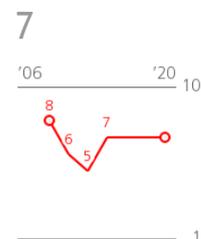
The IMF has acknowledged BEAC's objective of maintaining stability and optimizing its members' global appeal, but it remains to be seen how monetary stability develops. Recent confirmation of its membership in OPEC in 2018 may suggest a more-stable economy and fiscal policy for the Republic of Congo going forward, though dependence on oil and rampant corruption obviously remain significant concerns.

There are no legal restrictions on foreign exchange, including the conversion, transfer or repatriation of funds. Though large transfers (e.g., over \$10,000) must be recorded as per CEMAC regulations. Given its fixed exchange rate to the euro (€1 to CFA 655.957), foreign exchange is widely available and the Central African franc is fully convertible. The exchange rate fluctuates according to the euro's movements.

Due to the volatility of oil prices and the regime's failure to pursue medium-term objectives, the Republic of Congo tends to oscillate between ambitious, anti-IMF programs during oil booms (e.g., in 2017) and IMF-induced austerity (e.g., between 2014 and 2017). With the fall in oil prices, the public debt increased from 46.8% of GDP in 2014 to 117.7% in 2017, though the Heritage Foundation estimated a decline in 2018 to 83% of GDP. Nonetheless, the regime's extreme dependence on oil revenues, and on loans when revenues decline, has created an increasingly unstable fiscal scenario. Between 2016 and 2018, government spending and budget deficits have averaged 47.1% and 14.5% of GDP, respectively.

Given the mounting debt and unsustainable fiscal policies practiced by the regime, total reserves have declined from over \$5,000 million prior to 2014 to \$380 million in 2017 (most recent data available). Given its recently gained membership in OPEC, the Republic of Congo may have slightly more control over the volatility of the global

Monetary stability



Fiscal stability



oil market, although its probable influence within OPEC is rather minimal. The more pressing concern, however, is the dependence on oil, which subjects the domestic economy to extreme volatility and rapid increases in public debt as the regime attempts to maintain a bloated, inefficient public sector.

9 | Private Property

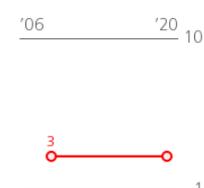
The state apparatus, under Sassou Nguesso, retains significant control of property and resources in key sectors, particularly oil, timber and minerals. The property rights regime is largely designed to maintain this system through state-owned enterprises and other mechanisms. The state-owned oil company is directly controlled by the Sassou Nguesso family. In the review period, there has been no improvement, and perhaps a slight decline, in the protection of property rights. This is particularly influenced by the expansive influence of SOEs, the distinct clientelism and corruption surrounding Sassou Nguesso and other key elites, and the weak effectiveness of the judiciary in functioning as a counterbalance to such influences. While property rights are defined and codified within established legal frameworks, the ineffective bureaucracy, weak judiciary and rampant corruption put these rights at risk.

Despite a slight improvement over its 2018 score, the Republic of Congo ranked 180 out of 190 countries in the World Bank's Doing Business Index 2019. Starting a business takes 49 days and 10 procedures (rank 179), while registering property takes 55 days and 6 procedures (rank 177), and taxes on profit are 54.3% (rank 185). Enforcement of contracts is below the sub-continental average, with the Republic of Congo ranked 155 out of 190.

SOEs and joint ventures retain significant influence within the domestic market, with sectors such as oil, timber, banking, farming and tourism influenced by significant public investment. This, added to an inefficient bureaucracy and corrupt public administration, grant private enterprises little real influence or bargaining power within the Republic of Congo's economy. Despite external (IMF and World Bank) attempts to impose privatization, efforts to date have been limited and superficial, with little real control relinquished by Sassou Nguesso's clientelist network.

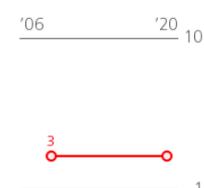
Property rights

3



Private enterprise

3



10 | Welfare Regime

Generally speaking, socioeconomic conditions have improved for the majority of the Congolese population over the past decade, with high oil revenues in the first half of the decade (prior to 2014) allowing for increased spending on social safety nets. As a result, life expectancy has increased from under 60 years prior to 2010 to 65.1 years in 2018. The decline in oil revenues between 2014 and 2017, however, resulted in declining social expenditures, with health expenditure declining from 5.2% of GDP in 2014 to 3.4% in 2018. Of children under 5 years old, 21.2% face moderate to severe malnutrition.

With a poverty rate of 52.5%, vulnerable employment at 74.9% and a child labor rate of 23.3%, the majority of the Congolese population continues to suffer in socioeconomic terms. Though social safety nets and pension schemes do exist for the few workers in the formal economy, only 22.1% of eligible individuals receive old-age pensions. Refugees, foreign workers and indigenous (Pygmy) peoples experience discrimination in terms of access to services, housing, employment and education.

Equality of opportunity is next-to-nonexistent in the Republic of Congo, with employment opportunities, public office and access to education all restricted based on ethnicity and gender. Women occupy 47.3% of employment outside of agriculture and only 14% of seats in parliament, with a female-to-male unemployment ratio of 1.14. The most recent data available indicate a female literacy rate of 72.9% compared to a male literacy rate of 86.4%.

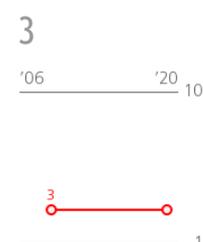
Discrimination based on ethnicity is not uncommon, particularly against foreign Africans and indigenous Pygmy populations. Pygmy peoples have limited access to education and employment and are frequent targets of violence. As Sassou Nguesso has tightened his grip on power, access to ministerial, parastatal and military positions has been largely reserved for northerners, particularly from Sassou Nguesso's home region of Cuvette. This sustained ethnic favoritism has stoked the cleavages that have prompted repeated instances of conflict since 1997.

11 | Economic Performance

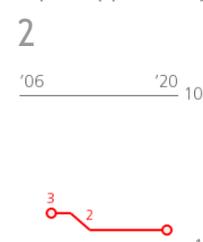
Aided by oil revenues and international donors, the Republic of Congo was largely able to overcome the economic crises prompted by the 1997 civil war and the 2008 global financial crisis. Starting mid-2014, however, oil revenues declined as global demand and prices fell. Like other CEMAC countries, the decline in revenue from oil has been the most significant economic factor over the past five years.

Despite fluctuations in 2018, oil production has been stable during the review period at around 350,000 barrels per day. This is an increase on the previous review period,

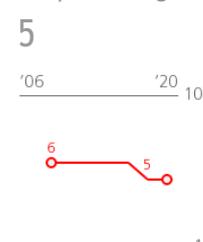
Social safety nets



Equal opportunity



Output strength



but has not mitigated the negative effects on the Republic of Congo's economy of low oil prices. The Republic of Congo's GDP contracted 2.8% between 2015 and 2016, and 4.6% between 2016 and 2017. GDP per capita growth (constant local currency) shrunk even more in 2017. According to the World Bank, GDP per capita shrunk by 7% in 2017. GDP grew by 1% in 2018 and is expected to grow by 3.2% in 2019, according to World Bank data. However, GDP is predicted to contract from 2020.

The non-oil sector continues to suffer from a deep recession, contracting by about 9.2% in 2017 and 6% in 2018.

Inflation is estimated at 3.6% for 2018, down from 4.5% in 2015. Foreign direct investment is estimated at 6.7% of GDP for 2018, down from 13.3% in 2017 and 25.6% in 2016. Public debt remains an area of concern, rising from 46.8% of GDP in 2014 to 117.7% of GDP in 2017, before declining to 83% of GDP in 2018. The overall tax burden amounts to 27.2% of domestic income, with government spending in recent years averaging 47.1% of GDP and budget deficits of 14% of GDP.

GDP per capita (PPP) is estimated by the IMF at \$7,110 for 2019, up from \$6,760 in 2017 and \$6,880 in 2018 (current prices). Gross capital formation was 26.6% of GDP in 2017, down from 50.4% in 2016. Total investment is estimated to remain just above 25% of GDP for both 2018 and 2019, down from 32.4% in 2017 and 60.86% in 2016.

What little economic progress has been made in recent years has been primarily distributed among the oil-company and state elites. Meanwhile, much of the population remains employed in subsistence agriculture and the informal economy. The financial insecurity ensured by these conditions is worsened by the rapid urbanization rate and a growing dependence on food imports due to central government inaction. The Republic of Congo remains largely dependent on trade, with exports and imports combining to equal 138.6% of GDP.

12 | Sustainability

Despite the timber industry remaining the key economic industry after oil, forests still cover more than half of the country, with the total forested area decreasing by 1.7% between 1990 and 2015. Carbon dioxide emissions are 0.6 tons per capita, which has been relatively stable over the past decade. Renewable energy, primarily hydropower, accounts for roughly 60% of total energy consumption, compared to 40% for fossil fuels. Given the state-run nature of the country's utilities, this can be interpreted as a result of government policy.

Despite some positive figures, however, pollution, soil erosion and varying weather patterns pose particular challenges. The rapid rate of urbanization, and lack of

Environmental
policy

2

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genuine regulation of oil, mining and other industries have been key drivers of these patterns. Despite superficial measures and commitments to environmental sustainability, the Sassou Nguesso regime remains primarily concerned with remaining in power and maintaining the intricate clientelist network built upon these damaging industries. As such, forestry licenses and other land distribution for exploitation is largely unregulated and driven by political interests, which give little consideration to environmental impact.

The Republic of Congo's Red List Index score was 0.984, indicating a significant majority of the Republic of Congo's species are not at risk of extinction. According to the most recent U.N. data (2015), 119 species were threatened with extinction, an increase of 10 over 2013. The Republic of Congo has elected to participate in international and regional environmental protection agreements, with the 2015 Paris Agreement and 2018 Brazzaville Declaration recent examples. The latter, signed between the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, was a Congo Basin agreement to protect the world's largest tropical peatlands.

In all, the Republic of Congo ranked 157 out of 180 countries in the 2018 Environmental Performance Index, scoring 42.39, both worse than in the previous review period. This is largely driven by air and water pollution. The Republic of Congo ranked 175 in environmental health (20.89), 172 in air quality (23.84), and 157 in water and sanitation (10.26). These scores demonstrate the ineffectiveness and superficiality of the few measures that have been implemented in the Republic of Congo under Sassou Nguesso and the lack of real standards in terms of environmental sustainability.

Institutions for and expenditure on education and R&D remains negligible, with most facilities located within the key urban centers of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. Access to education and training facilities in rural areas remain low, despite improvements since the 1997 – 2003 civil war. According to the most recent data (2010), government expenditure on education was 6.2% of GDP, though this will have declined post-2014.

The U.N. Education Index for the Republic of Congo stood at 0.526 in 2017, with limited gains in recent years, although this is relatively high by regional terms.

Gross enrollment rates, as of 2012 (most recent data), were 104% for primary, 52% for secondary and 9% for tertiary-aged populations, respectively. The most recent U.N. data (2013) indicates a primary school dropout rate of 29.7%.

Adult literacy was estimated at 79.3% (72.9% female, 86.4% male). Illiteracy remains a concern among rural and elderly populations. The quality and focus of education and training is largely shaped by the political climate, with the Sassou

Education policy /
R&D

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Nguesso regime developing curricula in its interests (i.e., through ideology or propaganda).

R&D efforts remain at very low levels, with no available data regarding government expenditure. Such efforts are typically mirrored in infrastructural improvements, however. As such, given that only 8.1% of the population had access to the internet in 2016, it appears that the Sassou Nguesso regime has made little effort to promote R&D.

Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

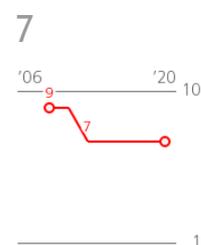
As in previous review periods, Congolese economic and political activities are dependent on the oil sector. Given increased production in recent years, as well as having become a certified member of OPEC, economic activity has stabilized and will likely remain stable in the medium term. This system is designed primarily for the maintenance of Congolese elites, particularly those close to President Sassou Nguesso. Therefore, oil revenues generate little real benefit or development for the country. Though the IMF and civil society have pushed for increased transparency in the oil sector, the 2018 suspension of the Republic of Congo from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) suggests real progress has been limited at best.

As a result of the lack of genuine diversification, the non-oil sector continues to be a non-factor in economic functions. Non-oil revenues declined by 6% of non-oil GDP between 2017 and 2018. Yet, 2018 witnessed an overall surplus due to expanding oil revenues. The government's failure to invest in non-oil sectors alongside a nearly nonexistent domestic business climate enables the overall economic cycle of volatility of which the Republic of Congo has long been victim.

Mass poverty, ethno-regional political conflict and violence, poor education and training, deficient infrastructure, and a weak civil society are among the major constraints on the Republic of Congo's prospects. Most recently, violence initiated by the state and militias has stoked instability, particularly in Pool. Such conflict has been driven by the increasingly regionalized nature of the regime, employing northern support and suppressing southern dissent. These structural deficiencies are employed by the Sassou Nguesso regime to exert control and maintain the elite position of his cohorts.

In the short to medium term, increased production and revenues from oil will provide for limited security, dependent on the global market and reserves. A dependence on imports for basic commodities (e.g., food) will continue to pose a risk to the Republic of Congo, while debt is a consistent concern and will remain as such. Continued conflict in Central African Republic alongside uncertainty surrounding the recent election in the Democratic Republic of Congo and (to a lesser extent) the attempted coup in Gabon pose plausible external imponderabilities, which may affect the Republic of Congo either directly or indirectly.

Structural
constraints



There are numerous civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Congo, many of which operate under the umbrella of PCPA Congo, which serves to engage CSOs, state actors, French interests and NGOs. In recent years, many CSOs have been engaged in appealing to the IMF to tackle the lack of transparency in the Republic of Congo's state oil company, but for the most part such organizations have remained limited in scope and effectiveness. The transition to democracy in the early 1990s sparked a growth in CSOs, though this progress has been consistently and increasingly challenged since Sassou Nguesso's return to power in 1997. CSOs and NGOs are required to register with the state, although there is no independent body to monitor their operations. As such, CSOs' operations are far from free and must be measured in activity, as any hint of opposition to the regime is promptly suppressed. Given the tendency toward state monitoring and interference, CSOs and NGOs tend to limit or localize their focus, avoiding areas of potential political conflict.

The government has not hesitated to limit communication services (phone service, internet) to limit opposition in key periods of political conflict. The regime has been accused by organizations (e.g., the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights (OCDH), Transparency International and Amnesty International) of human rights violations, including wrongful detainment and torture of activists, leaders of CSOs and journalists. Such violations have only increased in the aftermath of the 2016 election and the conflict in Pool. Beyond displacement, the infrastructural and economic damage done to the peoples of Pool, and the evident limitations on their ability to organize for fear of further reprisals, is an area of continuing concern.

Given the nature and frequency of conflict in the Republic of Congo, many CSOs are organized on an ethno-regional basis, largely attributable to the clear divides between north and south that have evolved since the civil war. Village-level organizations, which once played an important role in societal functions in the Republic of Congo, have a negligible impact beyond the local level. In all, the effective functioning of any CSO in the Republic of Congo is dependent on compliance with, or at least not contradicting, the regime and various vested elite-level interests.

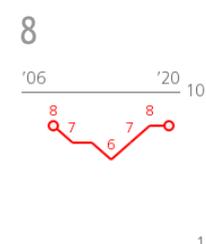
Ethnic, regional and social conflicts are very much the norm for the Congo region. An often-violent north-south division alongside mass poverty and displacement have generated an unstable environment for much of the Republic of Congo's independent history. These divisions were prominent in the civil wars of the 1990s and early 2000s and were similarly demonstrated by the crackdown on the region of Pool following the 2016 elections. In the latter case, around 138,000 people were displaced, with credible accusations of ethnic targeting, torture and other human rights abuses committed by both the government and local militias.

Beyond manifestations of conflict, ethno-regional divisions are evident in the makeup of key political parties, including the ruling PCT, MCDDI and UPADS. Conflicts such as that in Pool and the more general patterns of conflict surrounding the recent elections have been largely focused on suppressing southern opposition to the regime

Civil society traditions



Conflict intensity



of Denis Sassou Nguesso, with divisions stoked amongst the population to generate support for the regime.

In addition to internal ethno-regional divisions, the scapegoating of foreigners, particularly other Africans, for economic woes has been a common tool employed by the regime so as to redirect growing resentments, particularly within key urban centers. Citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic have been expelled at times, with the respective borders similarly subject to closure. Most recently, the continued conflict in Central African Republic has prompted a distinct growth in anti-Muslim sentiment among the majority-Christian Congolese population. The continued threat of conflict in neighboring countries poses the risk of incursions by foreign militias or other outbreaks of violence within key enclaves.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The regime maintains a position of supremacy within the Congolese political and economic systems, allowing it to formulate and prioritize policies in the absence of an organized opposition. Increased oil production and mounting debt has allowed the regime to prioritize reinvestment in this sector over the development of non-oil sectors, which continue to suffer. The failure to diversify has been employed by the regime as a tool for maintaining the narrow Franco-Congolese clientelist network on which the Congolese elites are dependent.

Pressure from the IMF, World Bank, European Union and other key actors have to some extent swayed government policy in recent years, though the implementation of these policies has been minimal. The IMF, prompted by Congolese CSOs, has called for improved transparency in the oil sector, engagement with CSOs and investment in non-oil sectors, none of which have been implemented by the regime with any real commitment. The regime's employment of ethnic and regional divides for political benefit has largely served to divide the population and make the stability, and survival, of the Republic of Congo's government increasingly tenuous.

Infrastructural and other development projects, such as the Brazzaville-Kinshasa bridge, are largely centered on the major urban centers and do not serve to address the real infrastructural issues facing most Congolese people. Such projects are rarely more than symbolic, often solely benefiting the elites or vested mining/industrial interests. Strategic aims employed by the regime are not commensurate with the country's real problems, with short- to medium-term concentrated economic benefits prioritized over the social, economic, political, environmental or security needs of the population.

Question
Score

Prioritization

4

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1

The regime typically offers a rhetorical commitment to diversification, socioeconomic development and ecological sustainability. In practice, such priorities are quickly overshadowed by the pre-eminence of the oil sector and Sassou Nguesso's corrupt network. This is especially the case during times of growing oil production and revenues, which are minimally reinvested into the rest of the economy. During times of recession or high debt, which remains the case, IMF pressure in particular has been effective in shaping government policies, but such progress has consistently been undermined.

Policies to improve transparency, corruption and engagement with civil society are all undermined by the embedded network surrounding Sassou Nguesso and other elites, with the ultimate priority of government action being the preservation of vested interests. As a result, much of the regime's policy-making and activities can be categorized as corrupt. The current recession in non-oil sectors of the economy amidst growing oil production and revenues can be taken as evidence that the regime's rhetorical priorities of diversification, transparency and sustainable development are rarely implemented.

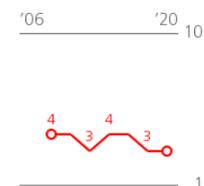
The pro-cyclical fiscal and spending policies of the government undermine stability and subject the Republic of Congo to the intense volatility that often accompanies a deep dependence on oil revenues. As such, in times of recession (e.g., during the previous review period), public spending is dramatically cut to counterbalance declining revenues. Such actions place much of the burden on the urban and rural poor, while times of increased revenue (e.g., during the current review period) are not accompanied by similar benefits for the population. This unstable fiscal system has continuously diminished the legitimacy and security of the Sassou Nguesso regime. The Sassou Nguesso government received debt relief from the IMF and World Bank in 2010, and its economic policies resulted in a new debt crisis just six years later.

Rather than address such cycles through economic diversification, transparency and genuine developmental policies, the regime continues to prioritize investment in the oil sector, and the maintenance of short- and medium-term rents. IMF and CSO pressure has at times forced the regime to respond with meaningful adjustments, but the period under review has witnessed very little real implementation of such rhetorical commitments.

Violent crackdowns in response to opposition have further ensured the rigidity of the regime's priorities. Development policies continue to primarily benefit state elites, while most of the limited humanitarian aid targeted at migrants, refugees and displaced people has been provided by non-state and international actors. Despite mounting domestic and international pressure, the policies demonstrably implemented by the regime during the review period have shown little improvement or learning from previous economic and political practices.

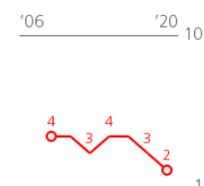
Implementation

3



Policy learning

2



15 | Resource Efficiency

Given the well-documented corruption and the power wielded by vested interests, the regime under Sassou Nguesso utilizes very little of its oil revenues for the benefit of other sectors of the economy, let alone social priorities. Siphoning public revenues, primarily from oil, has been of growing concern. The president's daughter and her husband were arrested in France in 2017 on charges of money laundering and the misuse of public resources.

The maintenance of this clientelist network being the priority of state activities, a bloated cabinet and inefficient bureaucracy further contribute to the failure by the state to efficiently utilize its at-times significant revenues. The poor quality of the education system and low training standards aid the lack of transparency and general ineffectiveness of many public systems. Very little data is available in this realm, but the government is characterized by centralization, clientelism, generally poor (human, financial and organizational) resources (excluding oil revenues), and a reluctance on behalf of the Sassou Nguesso regime to sustainably reinvest and reinforce its resources.

Though the highly personalized nature of the Republic of Congo's government under Sassou Nguesso ensures a degree of centralization, competition among ministers and other state elites in favor of Sassou Nguesso, which undermines the overall coherence of policy. Vested corporate and personal interests tend to impact the policy directions of the regime, with the resistance and undermining of state objectives of diversification a key instance.

Pressure from the IMF, World Bank and CSOs has at times stoked shifts in stated policy. Nonetheless, improvements are often undermined by a lack of transparency and complex clientelist networks. Many public work and utility programs serve to benefit certain members of the elite while doing little to elevate its population out of poverty. Stated objectives of development, diversification and humanitarian aid are rarely implemented, with the regime's focus on suppressing opposition actors and maintaining the elevated position of its clientelist network preventing any consistent efforts toward sustainable governance.

As has been widely discussed throughout this report, corruption is rife and central to the maintenance of Sassou Nguesso's regime. The most poignant example of this was the arrest of the president's daughter in 2017. The amount of revenue siphoned from the oil sector to Sassou Nguesso's inner circle is immeasurable. NGOs (e.g., the Berne Declaration, OCDH and the Congolese Catholic Church) have decried the intricate system of corruption employed under Sassou Nguesso.

The Republic of Congo is party to both the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), with the IMF and World

Efficient use of assets

3

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Policy coordination

3

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Anti-corruption policy

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Bank providing further guidance to and oversight of governance in the Republic of Congo. Such organizations have had little real impact on the regime's policies in the review period, however. Rising oil revenues and an increasing degree of repression have ensured very little change in terms of these corrupt structures, while allowing for a loosening of the austerity that had accompanied the mid-2014 drop in oil prices.

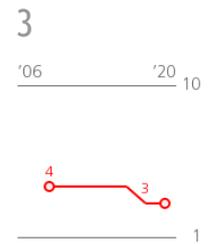
Rhetorically, the regime has committed to combatting corruption and improving transparency, but this rhetoric is undermined by the continued activities of the vested elites in the Republic of Congo. The regime's money laundering and clientelist network is designed to obscure this behavior from external observers. There are two government institutes aimed at tackling corruption and fraud, CNLCCF and OAC, but these have not had any demonstrable effect on the general operation of corruption, especially at the elite levels of society.

16 | Consensus-Building

Rhetorically, the regime strives for multi-party democratic systems, which represent public will through an effective balance of power. These desires are shared by a majority of the population, as has been demonstrated by recent responses to potentially fraudulent election results. In practice, however, elections are typically marred by protests against manufactured results and subsequent government suppression. Given the highly personalized nature of rule under Sassou Nguesso and the authoritarian nature of governance, real progress toward democratization has been consistently undermined over the past decade. Given Sassou Nguesso and the PCT's own history of support for one-party rule prior to the civil war, it is highly doubtful that substantial progress will be made under the current regime. Key opposition figures and journalists who have called for a more-democratic and -transparent system of governance have frequently been met with violent crackdowns and imprisonment, with "national dialogues" organized as superficial efforts to shield the autocratic nature of rule. Violence and protests surrounding the 2015 referendum, 2016 presidential election and 2017 legislative elections illustrate the illegitimacy of the current system and the dearth of true consensus-building in Republic of Congo.

The government does not view a market economy as a priority, with previous years' IMF-induced improvements undermined in times of increased oil revenues. Recent increases in revenue driven by increased production have allowed the government to largely ignore calls for transparency and diversification, prompting the non-oil sectors to continue to contract. Though investment in oil remains substantial, there is no real openness or opportunity elsewhere in the domestic market. Given centrality of oil to the wealth and power of Sassou Nguesso and other state elites, there have been no real strides to further open the economy beyond what is necessary to maintain oil rents. Though opposition and civil society figures have at times called for a more-liberal market economy, these figures are politically weak and any real change would

Consensus on goals



have to come from within the regime. Pressure from the IMF has at times prompted some progress toward a market economy, but these are undermined whenever oil revenues are substantial enough to embolden the regime. Without genuine diversification and transparency in the economy, there is no real indication of a market economy in the Republic of Congo.

Given the personalized and authoritarian nature of rule under Sassou Nguesso, the majority of power in the Republic of Congo is vested in anti-democratic actors. State actors including the president are focused primarily on personal enrichment and remaining in power, with policies and results demonstrating these priorities. As such, reform-minded actors are virtually powerless against the regime, with violent repression of opposition actors and outspoken journalists surrounding the 2015 – 2017 referendum and elections indicating the regime’s unwillingness to listen to any critical perspectives.

Reformers and protesters unwilling to cooperate with the regime face violent reprisals. The violent crackdown in the region of Pool and the ongoing displacement crisis illustrates the regime’s willingness to target civilians as part of its general policy of suppression and unchallenged rule. This general policy is clearly at the expense of democratization, diversification and the protection of its citizenry’s basic human rights. Sassou Nguesso and other state actors seem particularly emboldened by recent election results and growing oil revenues to use any means to suppress reformers or other challengers.

Ethnic and regional cleavages are major sources of conflict in the Republic of Congo, with the Sassou Nguesso regime often operationalizing these cleavages to mobilize support and justify repression. A prominent example of the regime’s stoking of ethno-regional and social cleavages has been the recent conflict in Pool in which the local ethnic Lari population were targeted by military forces primarily comprised of Mbochi. Sassou Nguesso’s focus on maintaining power has culminated in a concentrated effort to elevate the status of northerners, particularly Mbochi, at the expense of southern peoples, such as the Lari. This carrot-and-stick approach is typical of clientelist networks, such as Sassou Nguesso’s networks, and illustrates his regime’s dependence on the mobilization of the population along ethnic, regional and social lines.

In terms of political influence, there are three key centers of power: Sassou Nguesso’s inner circle and political elites, primarily comprised of northern peoples; the southern Nibolek (Niari, Bouenza, Lekoumou) regions represented by the UPADS of former president Pascal Lissouba; and Brazzaville and the surrounding region of Pool, dominated by Parfait Kolelas and the MCDDI. These three interests are frequently at odds, though, with Sassou Nguesso’s longstanding reign, with the latter two areas have experienced widespread government suppression in recent decades. The recent conflict in Pool demonstrates the continued relevance of these centers of political operations and the regime’s tedious hold on power. Recent years have witnessed the

Anti-democratic actors

2

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Cleavage / conflict management

2

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increasing placement of people from Cuvette, loyal to Sassou Nguesso, in key ministerial and military positions, demonstrating the regime's continued reliance on ethnic cleavages for its survival.

The government of the Republic of Congo under Sassou Nguesso has frequently ignored and suppressed civil society actors, despite government rhetoric suggesting otherwise. Though civil society organizations are able to operate on a small scale and in increasing coordination with the IMF, the tendency on behalf of the regime is to suppress critical voices. This is prominently manifested in the arrest and torture of opposition politicians, journalists and activists, some of whom have died while in custody. The Catholic Church has been vocal in its calls for increased transparency and genuine efforts to tackle corruption, but such organizations in reality wield very little power over policy-making. Particularly in the aftermath of the Pool conflict, the regime has faced increasing accusations of human rights abuses, but control over the judiciary and every level of government prevents any independent oversight or accountability to civil society.

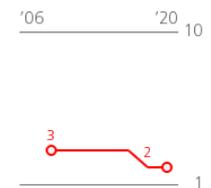
Unlike many war-torn countries, including some of its neighbors, the Republic of Congo never formed any truth and reconciliation commission in the aftermath of its civil conflict. The failure to address the deeply entrenched ethnic and regional cleavages, and the socioeconomic and sociopolitical ramifications thereof have prevented a substantial easing in tensions under Sassou Nguesso. Long-term prospects for peace and reconciliation are therefore bleak. Though the 2017 ceasefire and 2018 disarmament were agreed by both the government and revived Ninja rebel group, no further effort has been taken to address underlying injustices. The government crackdown on the Lari-majority region of Pool is just the latest example of the importance of ethno-regional cleavages in shaping the behavior of political leadership. Such efforts serve to exacerbate ethno-regional cleavages and solidify the sustained reign of existing political elites through the suppression of (primarily southern) opposition interests.

17 | International Cooperation

Though the Republic of Congo has a long history of cooperation with international donors, particularly the IMF, policy prescriptions and reform have consistently been undermined by the regime's repeated failures to diversify the economy. As the oil sector is subject to kleptocratic and other corrupt practices, genuine engagement with international partners in terms of transparency and other market-oriented priorities has been minimal. Key donor countries include the United States, France, Germany and China, with China emerging as a key partner during the review period. Beyond projects whose benefits are largely confined to the governing elite, however, the impact of this international engagement on the domestic environment has been negligible. As illustrated by the at-times immense debt levels, which have been a

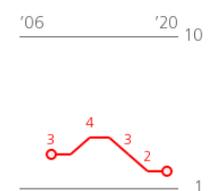
Civil society participation

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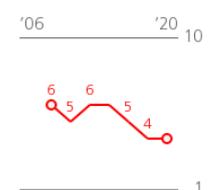
Reconciliation

2



Effective use of support

4

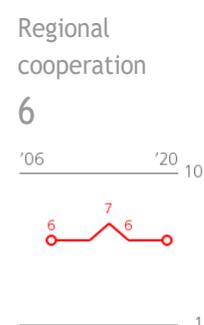
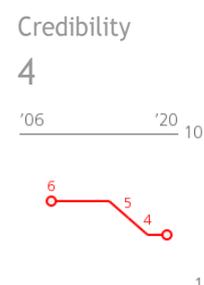


frequent pattern under Sassou Nguesso, development aid and loans are central to the survival of the regime. Meanwhile, a lack of diversification, transparency and reinvestment suggests the lack of any long-term development strategy.

The Sassou Nguesso regime has long sought to portray itself as a reliable partner for international partners, such as the United Nations, African Union or European Union. The government has forged strong relationships with many other autocratic regimes in Africa, while the Republic of Congo's most significant bilateral international agreements and trade have been with Western countries, such as France, Germany and the United States. China has, particularly since 2010, has become an increasingly important partner for the Republic of Congo, particularly concerning oil, minerals, forestry and symbolic infrastructural reinvestment. The Republic of Congo maintains a consistent dialogue with donors like the IMF and World Bank, especially in times of high debt or low revenues, but this rarely amounts to genuine cooperation or reform.

With the exception of China, many of the Republic of Congo's international relationships were shook by the crises between 2015 and 2017, and the explicit exercise of autocratic repression alongside rampant corruption. The damage incurred to its international image was largely subverted by growth in oil revenues, which decreased the regime's dependence on external actors. However, the regime's failure to present itself as a stable democratic partner, combined with the deteriorating human rights situation, clear corruption and repression has limited the Republic of Congo's reliability as an international partner. In October 2018, Moody's affirmed a Caa2 credit rating with an overall stable trend (elevated from an earlier negative trend), while Standard and Poor's had elevated the Republic of Congo's rating from CCC+ to B- in September 2018, with a similarly stable outlook. These ratings have remained largely consistent from the previous review period and are largely supported by the general stability of the Republic of Congo's oil sector.

Sassou Nguesso has attempted to position himself as the elder statesman of Central Africa. He has sought leadership roles in the African Union, and the sub-regional bodies of Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) and the Communauté Economique des États de l'Afrique Centrale (CEEAC). The Republic of Congo has relatively strong relationships with each of its five neighbors (Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Cameroon and Gabon) and tends to comply with the rules of the organizations to which it is party. Given Angola's support for Sassou Nguesso's return to power in the 1997 civil war, the regime has maintained particularly close ties to Angola, another CEEAC member. The Republic of Congo and Angola likewise share a dependence on oil, prompting a history of economic coordination and cooperation. Beyond Angola, South Africa, a key regional power, and source of food and goods imports, has served as an important partner in recent years.



The Republic of Congo's relationship with other neighbors is somewhat more complicated. For example, the Republic of Congo's borders with Central African Republic and DR Congo are key enclaves of conflict, with border crossings frequently closed. DR Congo, in many ways the Republic of Congo's nearest neighbor, has increasingly assumed a partner role, as demonstrated by the development of the Brazzaville-Kinshasa bridge. This has been aided by the mutual autocratic support between Sassou Nguesso and longtime DRC president Joseph Kabila. It remains to be seen whether the recent (democratic) transition of power and election of Félix Tshisekedi as DRC president (DR Congo's first peaceful transition of power) will lead to a slight reformulation of this relationship.

The Republic of Congo is one of five CEMAC countries dependent on oil, the others being Chad, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. As such, all of these countries shared the economic crisis prompted by low oil prices and cooperated to approach the IMF for support. The Republic of Congo's growing production has, however, made the Republic of Congo slightly less dependent on such cooperative relationships over the last few years.

Gabon and the Republic of Congo share a long history of cooperation, both serving as key centers of French Equatorial Africa before serving more recently as key enclaves of continued Francophone influence in Africa. The late Omar Bongo, Gabon's former president, was married to Sassou Nguesso's daughter, illustrating the intimate ties under Sassou Nguesso. Since Omar Bongo's death in 2009, Gabon has been ruled by Ali Bongo Ondimba, with whom Sassou Nguesso has a more tense relationship.

Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic have served as key areas of conflict, which has strained their relationships with the Republic of Congo at times. The Republic of Congo has expelled natives of other countries and closed borders at times, while simultaneously facing many of the same domestic issues itself. The Republic of Congo has served as a key member of the CEMAC and MINUSCA peacekeeping forces in Central African Republic, while Sassou Nguesso has at times attempted to assert himself as a mediator in certain conflicts.

Beyond peacekeeping and economic cooperation, the Republic of Congo has served as a key party to several environmental agreements (particularly regarding rainforests), signed the Paris Agreement, forged a number of Congo Basin agreements, and established national parks that border protected lands in Gabon and other neighboring countries. Such agreements, though typically limited in their real impact, and undermined by logging and oil concessions, present genuine opportunity for increased international pressure for more-sustainable practices and policies.

Strategic Outlook

Under Denis Sassou Nguesso, the Republic of Congo continues to be characterized by a highly personalized pattern of autocratic rule and the highly damaging clientelist network, which surrounds the president and his cohorts. The country has long been dependent on oil revenues. As such, given increased oil production in recent years, the country has experienced a turnaround in GDP growth. Meanwhile, non-oil sectors remain in recession, with most of the population dependent on subsistence agriculture and the informal economy, and therefore receives little real benefit from the wealth generated from oil. Though the IMF, World Bank and CSOs have long advocated for increased transparency and economic diversification, real progress in constructing a stable market economy has been limited at best. Given the direct connections between the Sassou Nguesso family, and leading oil and timber companies, the regime has little real interest in reforming the country's rentier economy.

The conflict in Pool is the latest example of the humanitarian and conflict-based concerns that face the country. The displacement of well over 100,000 people, many of whom have returned to burned and looted villages and homes, has accompanied an increasing humanitarian crisis in the country. The illegal detainment of opposition leaders, protesters and journalists alongside the targeting of ethnic Lari in the region of Pool have been decried by domestic and international NGOs. The government's failure to overcome the Republic of Congo's internal cleavages has contributed to the patterns of conflict and poverty that plague the country. Inadequate infrastructural and economic systems further prevent many Congolese, particularly the most marginalized, from attaining their most basic needs. Cooperation with the United Nations, IMF and other international organizations has led to rhetorical commitments to solving these problems, but to date little progress has been made by the regime.

From this basic overview, the following strategic recommendations must be achieved:

- 1) A pro-transparency, anti-corruption scheme: Without adequately addressing the rampant corruption, particularly within the oil sector, the Republic of Congo's macroeconomic goals will not be achieved. Increased transparency in this sector alongside efforts to increase reinvestment and economic diversification will improve accountability and hinder the general exercise of the regime's clientelist network.
- 2) Social and economic development programs: A major hurdle for the Republic of Congo's long-term prospects remains the lack of economic diversification or social reinvestment programs to tackle poverty and other key issues. More than half of the population remains in poverty while non-oil sectors of the economy contract. The lack of opportunities will continue to constrain the Republic of Congo's economic development until addressed.
- 3) Education, training and infrastructural improvements: Further constraining the construction of a domestic market economy is the still-inadequate education and training of the Congolese

population. Increased investment is necessary to elevate the capability of the Republic of Congo's population. Infrastructural improvements, particularly in rural areas, are similarly necessary. A concentrated reconstruction effort must be undertaken in Pool to address the government-created crisis there.

4) Improved social engagement: In the aftermath of years of sustained conflict and protests, largely along ethno-regional lines, the government must undertake a concerted effort to engage with and integrate under-represented interests in policy formation. Southern, minority and women's rights issues are particularly ignored, manifesting in sustained abuses against each of these populations.

5) Increased pressure from external actors: Organizations like the IMF and World Bank as well as key donor countries must serve a greater role in holding the Republic of Congo's regime accountable. Targeted economic pressure with the attached imposition of liberalization, transparency and diversification must be achieved to mitigate the damage corruption currently inflicts on the country's economic and political functions. Only by addressing these highly damaging structures can the Republic of Congo construct and implement genuine developmental priorities.