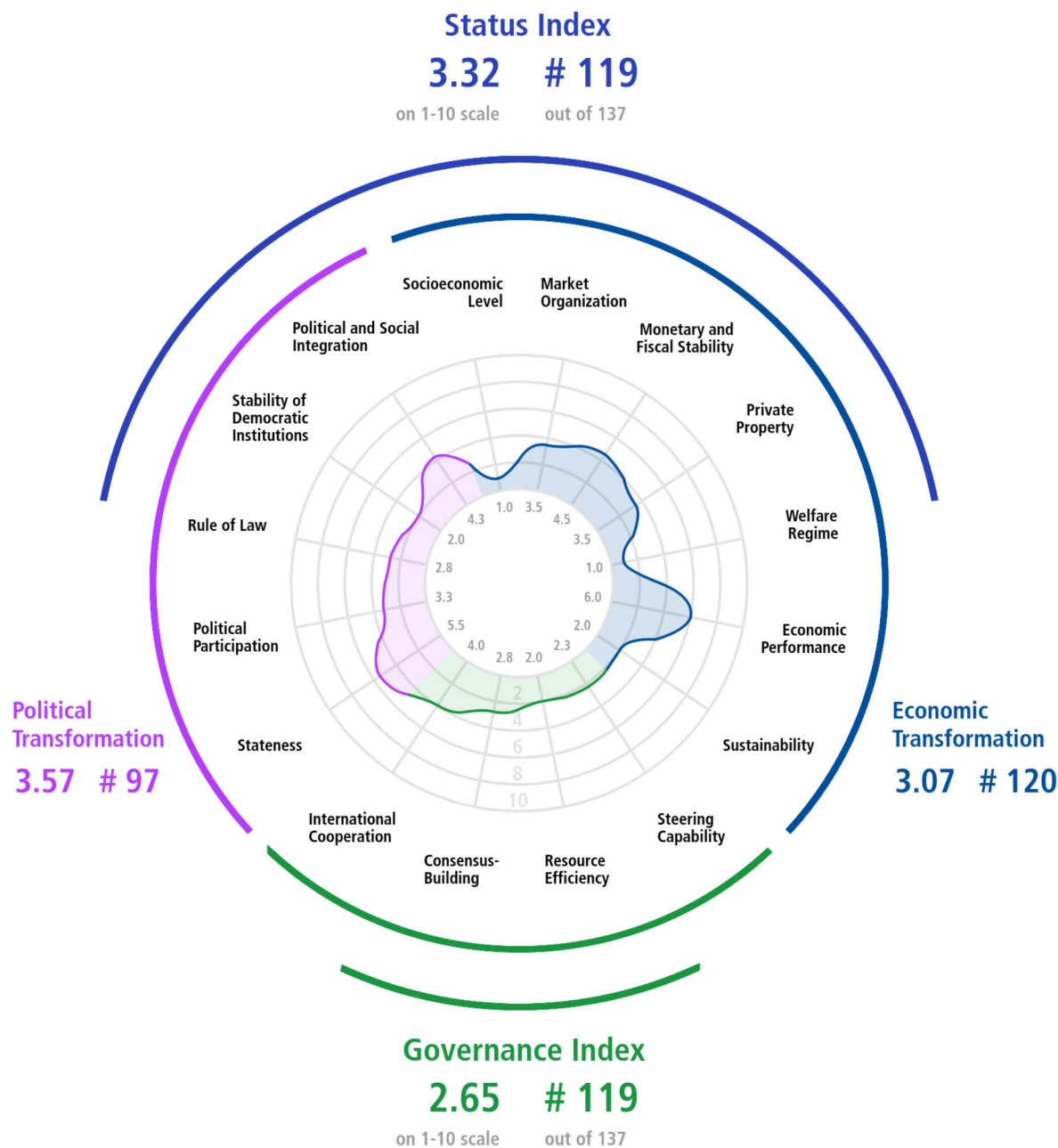


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1095
Land:	Den Demokratiske Republik Congo
Kilde:	Bertelsmann Stiftung
Titel:	BTI 2026 Country Report. Congo, DR
Udgivet:	27. marts 2026
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	29. april 2026

Congo, DR



This report is part of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. 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>.

Please cite as follows: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2026 Country Report – Congo, DR. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	109.3	HDI	0.522	GDP p.c., PPP \$	1710
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	3.2	HDI rank of 193	171	Gini Index	44.7
Life expectancy	years	61.9	UN Education Index	0.549	Poverty ³	% 92.1
Urban population	%	48.1	Gender inequality ²	0.604	Aid per capita \$	41.1

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

From 2023 to 2025, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faced significant challenges in its efforts toward democratic consolidation and economic transformation. Despite considerable growth in GDP, the broader population did not benefit from this economic expansion, with more than 70% of the population living below the poverty line. Economic growth remained heavily dependent on global commodity prices, particularly cobalt and copper, and was vulnerable to fluctuations in these markets. While sectors such as telecommunications and renewable energy showed promise, agriculture stagnated and infrastructure, especially in rural areas, remained underdeveloped.

Democratic institutions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continued to erode under a political landscape increasingly dominated by President Félix Tshisekedi. His re-election in December 2023 was marred by allegations of fraud, reinforcing perceptions of elections as instruments of elite consolidation rather than vehicles for democratic participation. Corruption remained pervasive, with patronage networks undermining governance and limiting institutional development. Despite promises of reform, Tshisekedi's administration struggled to deliver meaningful change. Public trust in electoral processes reached critically low levels, with only 12% of the population expressing confidence in these institutions.

The DRC's security situation, particularly in the eastern regions, continued to deteriorate. Armed groups such as the M23 rebel group maintained significant control of key areas, including the strategic city of Goma, while the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) struggled to secure vast portions of the country. Corruption within the military and political elite, combined with inadequate resources, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and left millions displaced and vulnerable to violence.

Economically, the DRC demonstrated resilience, with mining contributing to 70% of its GDP growth in 2023. However, this growth failed to reduce widespread inequality and poverty. The heavy dependence on extractive industries, along with rising public debt and a fiscal deficit, highlighted the need for structural reforms in governance and economic diversification. The DRC continued to rely on international aid, including a \$1.5 billion IMF credit facility, but reforms intended to strengthen transparency and fiscal discipline faced resistance from entrenched elites.

Environmental degradation remained acute despite the country's vast natural wealth, including the world's second-largest rainforest. Illegal mining, logging and deforestation advanced at alarming rates, while weak enforcement undermined government commitments to environmental protection. The auctioning of oil blocks in ecologically sensitive areas such as Virunga National Park triggered international outrage, highlighting the gap between the country's development strategies and sustainability pledges. Grassroots movements advocated for environmental protection, but systemic governance failures limited their impact. Moreover, aid intended to support environmental governance was frequently diverted, while conditionality tied to donor support proved weakly enforced. Western actors, reliant on DRC minerals and regional stability, retained limited leverage to push for meaningful accountability.

Overall, the economy showed some resilience but remained mired in cycles of poverty, corruption and political instability. Economic growth driven by mineral exports failed to translate into broad-based prosperity, while political institutions remained weak and dysfunctional. The prospects for democratic and economic transformation were uncertain, leaving much of the country's development potential untapped. Unlocking that potential would require urgent reforms in governance, economic diversification, security and environmental stewardship. Without such reforms, the DRC risks deepening inequality, worsening environmental degradation, and perpetuating political instability.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been defined by systemic challenges rooted in political instability, economic mismanagement, corruption and external interference. Decades of authoritarian rule, recurring conflicts and entrenched elite interests have stifled democratic governance and undermined economic development, despite the country's immense natural wealth.

Colonial exploitation under Belgian rule (1885 – 1960) laid the groundwork for many of the DRC's post-independence struggles. At independence in 1960, the country was immediately beset by ethnic tensions, army mutinies, and regional secessions, further destabilized by the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In this context of turmoil, Mobutu Sese Seko seized power in 1965, inaugurating 32 years of authoritarian rule characterized by corruption, the concentration of power and large-scale resource plunder. Although bolstered by Cold War support, Mobutu's regime faced mounting domestic and international pressures by the 1990s. His tentative gestures toward political liberalization proved hollow, as elections were repeatedly delayed and his grip on power remained firm.

In 1997, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), backed by Rwanda and Uganda, ousted Mobutu. Laurent-Désiré Kabila assumed power in 1997 but quickly adopted the same authoritarian practices, setting the stage for the Second Congo War (1998 – 2003). This devastating conflict, involving nine African states and numerous armed groups, was fueled by competition over the DRC's mineral riches – including cobalt, copper and coltan – and resulted in more than five million deaths, mass displacement, and widespread infrastructural collapse. Kabila's assassination in 2001 brought his son, Joseph Kabila, to power. While Joseph negotiated a fragile peace by 2003, his 18-year rule was plagued by corruption, electoral fraud, and only limited reform.

Under Félix Tshisekedi, elected in 2018 and re-elected in December 2023, hopes for reform have been tempered by persistent crises. His government has taken steps to improve international relations and attract foreign investment, yet poverty, corruption and crumbling infrastructure continue to stall meaningful progress. Armed conflict remains the most pressing challenge: more than 120 militias were active in the eastern provinces as of 2024. Among them, the Rwandan-backed M23 rebellion periodically captures strategic cities such as Goma and Bukavu, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians.

The economy, heavily dependent on cobalt, copper and other mineral wealth, suffers from deep structural weaknesses. Mining has fueled growth but not broad-based prosperity, as corruption and poor resource management undermine development. Efforts to reform the economic and financial sectors have produced few results, while international aid – though vital – has been blunted by opacity and mismanagement. Even flagship programs, such as the Local Development Program for 145 territories, have been plagued by elite capture and the diversion of funds.

Electoral integrity is another chronic concern. The DRC's elections are routinely marred by fraud, voter suppression, and violence, with opposition parties and civil society often disputing the outcomes. Rather than enabling genuine democratic participation, elections have largely served to entrench elite power, further eroding public confidence in state institutions.

The country's natural resources – valued in the trillions of dollars – hold enormous potential to transform the economy. But this promise can only be realized with genuine political will, institutional reform, and inclusive policymaking. External actors and global markets may shape the context, but durable progress depends on Congolese leadership prioritizing transparency, justice, and peacebuilding. Without such transformation, the cycle of instability and poverty is likely to endure.

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

To date, the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo does not maintain a monopoly on the use of force across its entire territory. Numerous regions, particularly in the east, remain under the control of armed groups. Key cities such as Goma and Bukavu in the east are effectively controlled by M23 – the most dominant of these armed groups. Many of these groups are reportedly supported, either directly or indirectly, by nationals or governments from neighboring countries who exploit the weaknesses of the Congolese state and military to operate within its borders.

Efforts to reform the Congolese National Police have been plagued by corruption and continue to fail to assert control over much of the country, especially in rural areas where a significant portion of the population resides and violence often originates. Systemic and widespread corruption within the FARDC, coupled with its under-resourcing, are among the many challenges that continue to slow professionalization and hinder efforts to fully establish the state's monopoly on the use of force.

The MONUSCO forces, confronted by the sophisticated capabilities of foreign-backed armed groups and, in part, hampered by a lack of in-depth understanding of the underlying issues and regional dynamics, have repeatedly failed to help create a stable and secure environment.

As a result, over the past two years the situation in the DRC has remained unstable, with the country serving as a haven for emerging local and foreign armed groups. These groups continue to challenge the state's monopoly on the use of force.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

3

'06 '26 10



Despite the state's violent history, vast territory and the diversity of its ethnic groups, languages and cultures, the Congolese people possess a remarkably strong sense of national identity. The concept of a unified Congolese nation-state has remained sacrosanct across the country.

Even though the Congolese state has largely failed to fulfill its public obligations and connectivity between distant regions remains limited, national identity continues to be one of the country's most defining characteristics, with a significant majority of Congolese proudly identifying with it. Issues related to citizenship and civic rights, addressed constitutionally in 2006, as well as widespread discrimination among ethnic groups – often cited as a root cause of violence in the eastern provinces – have not led to secessionist sentiments.

All major groups in the country – whether ethnic, regionally based, political parties or civil society organizations – have consistently supported the notion of an indivisible nation-state.

The country's constitution ensures a clear separation of state and church. Christian churches, particularly the Catholic Church – still the largest in terms of membership – hold significant social influence, largely through their provision of education and health care services.

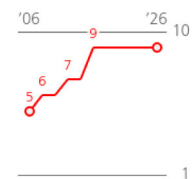
Minority religious groups, including the Kimbanguistes and Muslims, also wield visible social influence. While church leaders often engage in politics through civil society, advocating for and defending the interests of their communities, most politicians seek to align themselves with religious leaders to secure support from their congregations. There are various violent religious actors, mainly the Islamist Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) in the east, that have killed large numbers of civilians in recent years. In the west, Bundu dia Kongo – a movement blending Kimbanguist Christianity with traditionalist beliefs – has been inactive during the period under review.

However, the significant influence of religious actors has not translated into the passage of legislation that would not otherwise have been enacted. Historically, the Catholic Church – often in concert with established Protestant and evangelical denominations – has positioned itself as a vocal critic of the government.

For decades, the territorial reach of the Congolese state has been severely constrained. Rural areas in particular have remained largely beyond government presence, with little or no access to public services. According to World Bank data, as of 2022 only 35.1% of the population had access to a basic water source (11.6% to safely managed water). Access to sanitation stood at 16.2% (13.0% safely managed), and just 21.5% of the population had electricity. Efforts to rebuild administrative capacity through the government's development plan for the 145 territorial districts (PDL-145T) have been undermined by corruption and mismanagement, yielding few tangible results.

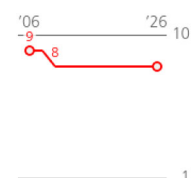
State identity

9



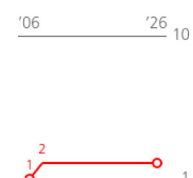
No interference of religious dogmas

8



Basic administration

2



Judicial reform – one of President Tshisekedi’s flagship promises – has proved similarly ineffective. In most rural areas, law and order are determined not by courts but by whoever holds weapons. In the few major cities where judicial institutions exist, the system remains biased and inefficient.

As a result, the DRC continues to operate with a weak and largely ineffective administrative infrastructure, undercut by corruption, poor governance and deep-seated ethnic rivalries.

2 | Political Participation

While the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) holds general multiparty elections based on democratic principles such as universal suffrage and secret ballots, the country’s electoral history remains marred by irregularities, contested outcomes, violence and weak democratic infrastructure.

The electoral process, though intended to foster democratic governance, has often been undermined by manipulation, fraud and state interference. Elections in 2006, 2011 and 2018 were each marked by allegations of electoral fraud and manipulation, with incumbent leaders frequently leveraging state institutions to secure their own victory or maintain power for their preferred candidates.

Local elections, originally mandated by the constitution to be held in 2007, were repeatedly postponed and ultimately conducted alongside the presidential and parliamentary polls in December 2023.

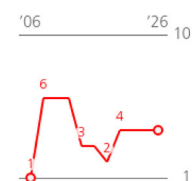
The 2023 elections, like those before them, reinforced a familiar pattern in the DRC: contests functioning less as genuine democratic exercises and more as mechanisms of elite legitimization. Provisions in the electoral law – revised ahead of the vote to guarantee equal media access for all parties and candidates – were only partially implemented. The media landscape remained skewed, with opposition voices restricted and persistent problems of censorship, disinformation and threats to press freedom.

Despite these challenges, outgoing President Félix Tshisekedi, bolstered by support from the DRC’s political elites and a divided opposition, emerged victorious with 73% of the vote, according to the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). This outcome, however, was widely disputed. Political rivals alleged widespread fraud and manipulation, while Catholic and Protestant observers reported serious irregularities.

Nevertheless, the Constitutional Court upheld Tshisekedi’s victory, and the ruling coalition (Union Sacrée) secured majorities in both parliamentary and local elections – results likewise criticized as compromised by irregularities. In the end, these elections underscored a disturbing pattern in the DRC: the consolidation of power by the ruling elite through flawed processes, at the expense of meaningful public participation and international credibility.

Free and fair elections

4



Although conflict-ridden areas remained inaccessible, President Tshisekedi, through his majority political coalition (Union Sacrée), held considerable power to oversee all significant government matters.

Influential figures, including the president's immediate family members and powerful allies, are known to informally control various sectors of the government and are responsible for many official state decisions. Elected officials tasked with oversight such as parliamentarians are often accused of corruption.

Nevertheless, this alone does not explain the country's governance challenges. Other factors – the near absence of functional state institutions, a deeply entrenched culture of corruption and the limited expertise of political leaders – are equally significant and arguably far more decisive.

The Congolese constitution formally guarantees citizens the right to freely form and operate political or civic organizations. In practice, however, the system disproportionately favors groups aligned with the president's ruling coalition. Journalists, opposition figures, and activists are routinely harassed by municipal leaders and security forces, often facing arbitrary detention, unfair trials, or forced exile. Several prominent opposition leaders – including Moïse Katumbi, Martin Fayulu and Matata Ponyo – have been barred by provincial authorities from entering certain regions or holding rallies. In some cases, supporters who joined protests were later found dead.

Since May 2021, President Tshisekedi has enforced a state of siege – effectively a state of emergency – in North Kivu and Ituri. Under this arrangement, civilian authorities have been replaced by military and police officials, who exercise sweeping powers to restrict fundamental freedoms, including the rights of assembly and association, and to try civilians in military courts. Although the National Assembly has repeatedly extended the measure, no serious debate has taken place about its effectiveness, even as key cities such as Goma and Bukavu have fallen to the M23 rebellion.

Thus, while opposition groups are legally permitted to exist, their ability to operate freely or exert meaningful influence remains severely constrained.

The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed by the constitution, but those who exercise this right often face restrictions.

The DRC hosts a diverse media landscape, including commercial, community, and faith-based radio and television outlets, some owned by opposition figures.

While there was some improvement in efforts to guarantee this right during the early presidency of Tshisekedi, there have been widespread reports of state harassment, criminal defamation suits, threats, detentions, arbitrary arrests, and physical attacks against citizens, organizations and journalists who expressed opposition to the

Effective power to govern

3

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Association / assembly rights

3

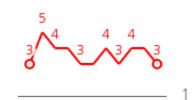
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Freedom of expression

3

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president and his government's priorities. Authorities increasingly use censorship and legal pressure to silence independent media; reporters covering corruption or military operations are especially vulnerable, often charged with defamation or detained. The legal system is widely exploited as a tool of intimidation.

During the review period, watchdog group Journalists in Danger (JED), alongside human rights organizations, has documented numerous violations, including the killing of five journalists in the eastern provinces and the detention or censorship of many others.

Reflecting these conditions, Freedom House in 2024 scored the DRC just 19 out of 100 in its Global Press Freedom Rankings, classifying the country as Not Free.

3 | Rule of Law

The 2006 constitution establishes a separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as provisions for a free and independent media. In practice, however, effective checks and balances between these institutions are lacking. President Félix Tshisekedi's coalition, the Union Sacrée, dominates elected offices, while loyalists have been placed in key institutions – including the highest courts – concentrating power in the presidency. The president, often through close associates, exerts control over political, legislative and judicial systems, reducing these institutions to little more than rubber-stamp bodies. Although parliament occasionally debates significant matters such as the national budget, the state of siege or ministerial accountability, such discussions rarely yield meaningful outcomes when they run counter to the presidency's agenda.

Oversight mechanisms disproportionately target officials unaffiliated with the president's platform. Even when allies face corruption allegations that attract public attention, justice is inconsistently applied and often manipulated to clear them of wrongdoing. Typically, implicated figures face only brief detentions before being released – often following quiet intervention from the presidency or its allies.

Patronage networks entrench this concentration of power. State interests are routinely subordinated to the president's political survival, while opposition criticism is marginalized and dismissed as rhetorical posturing.

Reforming the justice system remains President Tshisekedi's most prominent campaign pledge, yet little tangible progress has been made. Despite his frequent invocation of the motto *État de droit* ("rule of law") and formal guarantees of judicial independence, the sector remains underfunded, overburdened, and deeply compromised by political interference and corruption. Judges are appointed by the president on recommendations from the High Council of the Judiciary, whose members must demonstrate loyalty to the executive to keep their positions – undermining independence from the outset.

Separation of powers

3

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Independent judiciary

2

'06 '26 10



Prosecutions of presidential allies for abuses of office are exceedingly rare. When they do occur, they often end in quiet acquittals. Accused officials may briefly step back from public life, only to return once the courts – acting on political directives – clear them of charges. In practice, the judiciary functions as a subordinate arm of the executive and military authorities.

Even in civil and commercial disputes, courts are widely regarded as biased, with verdicts routinely favoring those who can pay the largest bribes or call on political and military connections.

Although legislation designed to prosecute corruption and abuse exists, most officials escape punishment, and verdicts are rarely enforced. Prosecutions are often wielded as tools to sideline political rivals rather than uphold the rule of law. Public trials frequently serve as political theater to bolster the president's image, while accountability remains elusive. Accused officials may vanish into prisons temporarily, only to secure release through elite connections or bribery.

A striking example is Nicolas Kazadi, a close ally of President Tshisekedi and former finance minister, who was charged with embezzling millions in infrastructure funds. Despite extensive evidence, the case was never fully investigated, and he was acquitted of all charges. This pattern extends to the president's family, friends, and allies: officials step down under pressure but rarely face conviction, even when incriminating evidence is widely known. Some are quietly reassigned to less visible positions, shielding them from further scrutiny.

Despite constitutional guarantees, civil rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are routinely violated, particularly in conflict zones such as North Kivu and Ituri. State security forces, including the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and allied militias, have been implicated in extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and the repression of dissent.

In August 2023, FARDC troops killed 57 civilians in Goma while enforcing a ban on protests. Notably, only low-ranking officers faced prosecution, while higher-level commanders evaded accountability. Since 2021, martial law in the east has further curtailed freedoms of expression and assembly, with opposition figures such as Seth Kikuni jailed on charges of “propagating rumors.”

Women in conflict-affected regions face catastrophic levels of sexual violence by both militias and state forces. In early 2023 alone, more than 38,000 cases were reported – a 37% rise from the previous year. Médecins Sans Frontières treated 674 survivors in just two weeks in April 2024. That same year, a prison break at Makala Central Prison saw 268 women, including 17 minors, raped by security forces and armed actors. Displacement camps remain especially dangerous: women foraging for food or firewood are at heightened risk of sexual assault.

The 2023 lifting of the moratorium on the death penalty has deepened fears, with 80 death sentences issued in 2024, many against government critics.

Prosecution of office abuse

3

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Civil rights

3

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According to a human rights report by the U.S. State Department, groups such as Indigenous persons and LGBTQ+ people report having no representation in the Senate, National Assembly, or provincial legislatures. They also face significant barriers to registering civic associations.

Overall, civil rights in the DRC remain gravely undermined, with systemic impunity and repression entrenched across the country.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Despite constitutional frameworks and repeated elections since 2006, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains locked in authoritarian governance. Power is concentrated in the hands of President Félix Tshisekedi, sustained through patronage networks, electoral fraud, and a co-opted judiciary. Elections are routinely marred by manipulation and voter suppression, while proposed constitutional reforms threaten to erode term limits and entrench unilateral rule. Institutions such as parliament and the courts lack independence, enabling systemic corruption and impunity. Opaque governance diverts public resources away from development, perpetuating poverty, inequality, and recurring conflict – particularly in the volatile east. Although the country possesses a pool of capable elites, meritocracy is suffocated by a system that rewards loyalty over competence. The resulting humanitarian crises, displacement and instability underscore the human cost of institutional collapse.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) exhibits only a fragile and superficial commitment to democratic institutions, marred by systemic instability and autocratic practices cloaked in the trappings of formal democracy. Opposition parties routinely reject electoral outcomes, underscoring deep mistrust in the process, while violent actors in the east show little regard for democratic norms. Democratic institutions function less on principled adherence than on shifting alliances and patronage networks.

This transactional acceptance of democracy is temporary, dissolving when power dynamics shift, particularly during elections. The presidency and allied elites wield disproportionate influence, including veto powers, concentrating decision-making and eroding checks and balances. Patronage – rewarding loyalty over competence – remains the cornerstone of political control, undermining institutional integrity and reducing state bodies to instruments of executive dominance rather than vehicles of democratic governance.

As a result, the DRC operates in a cycle of instability, where democratic institutions exist in form but lack substance. This hollow framework fosters a climate of uncertainty, weakens public trust, and risks entrenching autocratic rule.

Performance of
democratic
institutions

2

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Commitment to
democratic
institutions

2

'06 '26 10



5 | Political and Social Integration

The party system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains fragmented, personality-driven, and shaped by shifting alliances – a reflection of decades of political instability and weak institutionalization. Most parties are rooted more in communal loyalties than in ideology, with leaders relying heavily on ethnic ties to mobilize support.

By 2024, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) had registered roughly 1,000 political parties – a 51% increase since 2014. Most operate only at the local level, with just a handful enjoying national prominence: the ruling Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS) of President Félix Tshisekedi; the Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD), founded by former President Joseph Kabila; Ensemble pour le Changement, the main opposition party led by Moïse Katumbi; and the Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC) of Jean-Pierre Bemba, a former rebel leader and now a key Tshisekedi ally. The Union pour la Nation Congolaise (UNC), established by Vital Kamerhe, is another important partner in the ruling coalition.

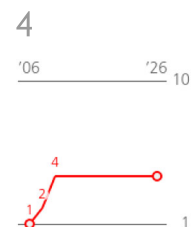
The party system is marked by voter volatility and unstable alliances, with parties often serving as vehicles for individual ambitions rather than coherent platforms. Tshisekedi's Union Sacrée pour la Nation (USN) coalition, for instance, depends on patronage to co-opt legislators but faces recurring instability as dissatisfied members – especially those denied cabinet posts – defect to the opposition. Opposition groups such as Katumbi's Ensemble and Martin Fayulu's ECIDE have also struggled to unite, further fracturing the electorate.

With no system of public financing, parties rely heavily on leaders' personal wealth or the diversion of state resources. Vital Kamerhe, for example, was imprisoned for embezzling \$48 million in public funds, some of which allegedly financed his political activities.

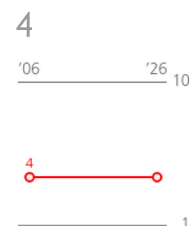
Interest groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) face steep obstacles under a regime that tightly restricts collective organization. Civic groups that do emerge rarely evolve into influential forces capable of shaping political or economic decision-making.

The few groups with real clout are typically those aligned with the presidency or powerful elites. Notable examples include the International Business Forum (Makutano) and the Federation of Enterprises of the Congo (FEC), a coalition of private investors and entrepreneurs. By contrast, employee organizations – particularly unions representing state workers such as teachers, professors, and health care professionals – hold limited sway. While strikes are legally permitted, union demands are often met with only token concessions and little lasting change.

Party system



Interest groups



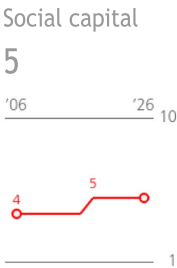
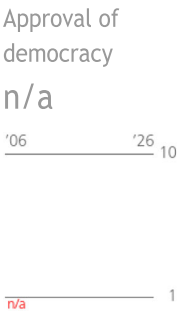
At times, social concerns are voiced by leaders of major Christian churches, especially the Catholic hierarchy. Yet even cautious interventions carry risks. In 2023, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo drew government backlash after denouncing corruption and human rights abuses. This illustrates the risks church leaders face when speaking out against the regime, as they can quickly become targets of state repression

There is limited empirical evidence regarding citizens’ consent to democratic norms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, high levels of participation in national general elections – particularly in 2006, 2011, 2018 and 2023 – and significant interest in political rallies may be interpreted as positive indicators of engagement. That said, the current demand for political change is often viewed less as a genuine endorsement of democratic principles and more as a reaction to the widespread social and economic hardships citizens endure. In many cases, the desire for change reflects frustration with the status quo rather than a deep commitment to democratic values.

Poverty, compounded by low levels of economic and social development and decades of violent conflict, has severely constrained the ability of Congolese citizens to organize in ways that advance the broader public good.

Although more than 5,000 NGOs are formally registered, few genuinely serve the common good. Many function primarily as vehicles for attracting funding, with benefits concentrated among small groups rather than addressing wider societal needs.

For most Congolese, survival depends on the informal economy and subsistence farming. In this context, solidarity is sustained less by formal organizations than by village communities, extended families and women’s associations, where interpersonal trust remains relatively strong.



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Decades of conflict, poor governance, chronic underinvestment, and the effects of global economic shocks have left much of the Congolese population trapped in extreme poverty, with limited access to even the most basic services. The country also suffers from one of the world’s largest infrastructure deficits.

According to the UNDP’s 2022 Human Development Index (HDI), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) ranked 180th out of 193 countries, with an HDI score of 0.481. Income inequality remains among the highest globally, reflected in a Gini coefficient of 44.7 (2020) and a gross national income (GNI) per capita of just \$600 in 2023. The World Bank estimates that 73% of Congolese live below the absolute poverty line, with most surviving on less than \$2.15 per day in 2024. More than 25 million people face food insecurity, driven by persistent violence and inadequate infrastructure.

While primary school enrollment has risen, some 97% of 10-year-olds experience “learning poverty,” unable to read and understand a simple text.

Gender inequality also remains stark. On the 2022 Gender Inequality Index, the DRC ranked 151st of 179 countries, with a score of 0.46. Women hold just 26.2% of parliamentary seats, reflecting a 47.6% gap in political representation. Although women’s labor force participation stands at a relatively high 47%, they earn significantly less than men and own fewer assets. Maternal mortality remains alarmingly high, at 214.7 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Nationwide, 52% of the population has access to basic water services, but only 29% in rural areas, compared with far higher – though often unreliable – coverage in urban centers such as Kinshasa. Access to sanitation is worse still: only 31% of the population has access nationwide, dropping to 21% in rural areas. Poor waste management compounds public health risks, particularly in underserved regions.

Infrastructure development is persistently undermined by corruption, weak governance and funding shortfalls. While NGOs and private actors have attempted to fill gaps, coverage remains patchy, leaving millions dependent on unsafe water and informal sanitation systems. Ongoing conflict further blocks progress, while political instability, limited funding, and weak administrative capacity continue to impede meaningful improvements, leaving rural communities especially exposed.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	55328.5	65801.5	67006.8	70749.4
GDP growth	%	6.2	8.9	8.6	6.7
Inflation (CPI)	%	-	-	-	-
Unemployment	%	5.3	4.5	4.5	4.6
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	3.0	2.1	3.5	4.1
Export growth	%	8.2	18.9	15.8	11.9
Import growth	%	43.6	24.9	105.1	18.4
Current account balance	\$ M	-587.4	-3148.1	-3882.7	-2719.4
Public debt	% of GDP	25.3	23.8	27.0	22.5
External debt	\$ M	9168.1	9714.3	11066.9	-
Total debt service	\$ M	321.1	384.7	491.0	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-0.2	-2.2	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	8.4	11.4	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	8.3	9.4	7.9	8.1
Public education spending	% of GDP	2.7	2.8	-	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	0.6	0.7	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	0.5	0.6	1.2	-

Sources (as of December 2025): 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

Since the early 2020s, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has sought to shift from a state-dominated to a market-oriented economy, including partial privatization in mining and telecommunications. Progress has stalled due to systemic corruption, opaque governance tied to presidential networks, and resistance from informal power structures involving government officials, the president's family, and domestic or foreign allies. Weak institutions, lack of transparency, and ongoing conflicts further undermine reforms. The economy remains heavily dependent on volatile mining exports, which made up 60% of GDP in 2023 (World Bank), while competition is confined to narrow sectors such as extractives and telecoms. Local

Market
organization

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production capacity is underdeveloped, and high import dependency – combined with bureaucratic barriers, tariffs, and logistical inefficiencies – has driven consumer prices 30–50% above regional averages. Foreign investors face prohibitive costs, arbitrary regulations, and unfair competition from politically connected entities, as shown by the 2023 exit of foreign agribusiness firms under pressure from domestic actors.

Monetary instability adds to these challenges. The Congolese franc (CDF) depreciated 15% year-on-year against the U.S. dollar as of Q1 2024, fueling inflation and import costs. A dual monetary system persists, with the dollar dominating large-scale commerce and elite wealth preservation, limiting the effectiveness of monetary policy. The informal sector employs about 80% of the workforce (African Development Bank, 2023), reflecting institutional failures including a nontransparent fiscal framework, off-budget spending, and widespread clientelism. Critical infrastructure gaps remain severe, with only 20% of roads paved nationwide which, in turn, hinders development.

Governance failures are entrenched. Beyond pervasive corruption, regulatory obstacles persist. The 2023 Global Competitiveness Report cites inefficient dispute resolution, extortionate informal fees, and arbitrary permit delays. Anti-corruption initiatives such as the National Agency for Investment Promotion (ANAPI) lack funding and autonomy to counter entrenched patronage networks. Real progress depends on dismantling opaque power structures, depoliticizing regulatory bodies, and addressing infrastructure deficits to unlock the DRC's economic potential.

For decades, the DRC relied on a state-controlled economic model, with monopolies in key sectors stifling private enterprise, innovation and market access – resulting in inefficiency and stagnation.

In 2018, the Competition Act (Law No. 18/030) was adopted to modernize regulations by promoting pricing freedom, fair competition and market liberalization. Its provisions include antitrust measures against price-fixing, collusion and other anti-competitive practices, as well as safeguards against actions that deter technological progress or investment. The 2023 amendment (Law No. 23/012) strengthened enforcement by aligning the act with regional standards from the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). Yet enforcement remains weak: only 12% of antitrust cases result in sanctions, hampered by limited capacity, inadequate funding, and political interference at the Autorité de Régulation de la Concurrence (ARCC).

Mining has attracted substantial private investment since 2007, driven by global demand for cobalt and copper, but foreign dominance and persistent problems with artisanal mining remain. In energy and water, state monopolies such as SNEL (electricity) and REGIDESO (water) are notoriously inefficient, with fewer than 20% of Congolese enjoying reliable electricity. Telecommunications, banking, and

Competition policy

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aviation have experienced somewhat greater competition, with mobile penetration reaching 53% in 2023. Still, monopolistic practices and elite control remain entrenched in several sectors, particularly mining, where 40% of contracts involve politically connected figures.

The DRC joined the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2022, formally committing to harmonize competition policy. The 2023 Digital Economy Law aims to modernize e-commerce and fintech regulation, though implementation has been slow.

Donor-funded initiatives, including the World Bank's DRC Growth Policy Operation, are working to strengthen the ARCC and ease barriers for SMEs. Yet state monopolies, weak enforcement, corruption, and entrenched political influence continue to obstruct economic diversification and equitable growth.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has prioritized economic liberalization to integrate into global and regional markets, maintaining trade agreements with more than 50 countries and participating in key organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and East African Community (EAC), which it joined in 2022. To streamline trade and reduce bureaucratic barriers, the government created agencies such as the Agence Nationale pour la Promotion des Investissements (ANAPI) and the Single Window for Foreign Trade (GUCE).

In 2022, the DRC ratified the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), gaining access to a market of 300 million consumers. By 2024, however, only 30% of AfCFTA tariff lines were operational. Despite new legislation, efforts to harmonize trade policy with regional frameworks remain inconsistent. The DRC ranked 158th of 176 countries in the Heritage Foundation's 2024 Index of Economic Freedom and 139th of 160 in the World Bank's 2023 Logistics Performance Index, reflecting weak infrastructure and customs inefficiencies.

Barriers such as slow administrative procedures, overlapping laws, corruption and elite capture in sectors like mining continue to hinder business operations. Infrastructure shortfalls remain severe, with fewer than 3% of roads paved and fewer than 15% of citizens with access to banking services.

The 2023 Digital Economy Law seeks to modernize e-commerce and fintech, though adoption has been slow. The World Bank's \$250 million Digital Acceleration Project (2023–2027) aims to improve trade-related digital infrastructure. Regional initiatives, including projects within SADC and the EAC, have targeted cross-border energy and transport corridors. The Lobito Corridor, proposed in 2023–2024, is intended to link the DRC to Angolan ports. Despite these measures, systemic weaknesses continue to impede progress in trade liberalization.

Liberalization of
foreign trade

5



The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has one of the world's lowest rates of financial inclusion, with only 12% of adults accessing formal financial services in 2023. More than 80% of transactions are conducted informally. The financial system consists of the Banque Centrale du Congo (BCC), 18 commercial banks, 21 microfinance institutions (MFIs), 72 cooperatives and 81 mobile money operators, including Airtel Money and Orange Money. Access remains highly urban-centric, with 85% of bank branches concentrated in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Goma. Only 6 of 26 provinces have significant banking infrastructure.

The banking system largely ignores international standards such as the Basel Accords. The World Bank reported a capital-to-asset ratio of 5.5% in 2022, while non-performing loans accounted for 7.4% of portfolios the same year.

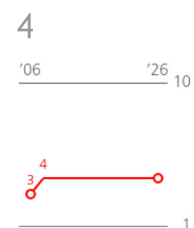
Although no legal barriers exist for foreign account holders, banking penetration is extremely low: just 9.1% of Congolese hold accounts, most of which are used for basic transactions rather than savings or credit. Credit to businesses and households amounts to only 3.2% of GDP – the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa – and interest rates above 18% deter long-term borrowing. Banks primarily provide short-term trade finance and foreign exchange services, reflecting political instability, weak contract enforcement and currency volatility.

Microfinance, intended to support SMEs and rural entrepreneurs, is underdeveloped, with only 15% of MFIs operating in rural areas where 63% of the population resides. Mobile money adoption remains limited at 29%, constrained by low literacy and poor internet access, which reaches just 22% of the population.

The BCC launched a Financial Inclusion Strategy in 2023 to expand digital banking and agent networks, while the World Bank's \$150 million DRC Financial Inclusion Project (2022–2026) aims to strengthen MFIs and rural cooperatives. Digital platforms such as Lipa Payments and CinetPay are also working to expand transaction access.

Despite vast natural wealth, the DRC's financial sector remains unable to mobilize domestic capital for development. While digital innovations offer some promise, geographic exclusion, institutional weakness and a high-risk environment continue to impede inclusive growth.

Banking system



8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Despite foreign exchange regulations introduced in 2014 designating the Congolese franc (CDF) as the primary currency, the DRC remains heavily dollarized. By 2024, more than 85% of large transactions and 60% of daily purchases were conducted in U.S. dollars. This dual-currency system undermines monetary sovereignty, complicates policy implementation and amplifies exchange rate volatility.

The constitution grants the Banque Centrale du Congo (BCC) independence to set monetary policy and maintain price stability. In practice, political interference is pervasive, with the presidency frequently pressuring the BCC to finance fiscal deficits in violation of borrowing limits. Transparency International reported \$1.2 billion in off-budget withdrawals since 2020, largely for patronage. Monetary decisions are often shaped by short-term political objectives, such as delaying interest rate hikes ahead of elections despite mounting inflation.

Inflation rose to 15.2% in mid-2023, fueled by currency depreciation – the CDF lost 23% against the USD – and external shocks. In January 2024, the BCC raised its policy rate to 25%, the sharpest increase in a decade, helping bring inflation down to 12.8% by April. Yet low banking penetration (9.1% in 2023) and an overwhelmingly informal economy (82% of employment) continue to blunt the impact of monetary tightening. The real effective exchange rate index stood at 127.0 in 2023, according to the World Bank (2010 = 100).

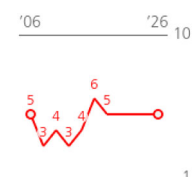
The BCC's foreign exchange interventions often prioritize safeguarding elite access to dollars over broader macroeconomic stability. Despite IMF pressure for tighter controls, reforms face resistance from politically connected beneficiaries of dollarization. The IMF's \$1.5 billion Extended Credit Facility, introduced in 2023, established stricter limits on deficit financing and called for greater transparency in BCC operations, though dollar scarcity persists.

In 2024, the BCC announced a pilot central bank digital currency (CBDC) to improve payment efficiency and reduce reliance on cash. However, lasting monetary stability will depend less on technological fixes than on depoliticizing the BCC, formalizing the financial sector and tackling the structural drivers of dollarization.

The DRC faces persistent fiscal challenges driven by overlapping crises, including ongoing conflicts in the east and the lingering effects of COVID-19. Despite these pressures, the government strengthened revenue collection, narrowing the budget deficit from 2.1% of GDP in 2020 to 1.5% in 2021 through stricter tax audits and penalties. The 2023 general elections, however, triggered a surge in public spending that widened the deficit to 2.8% of GDP, with only a modest decline to 2.3% projected for 2024 under planned austerity measures.

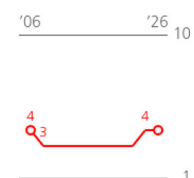
Monetary stability

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Fiscal stability

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Expenditure pressures remain high, particularly in public sector wages, which overshot targets by 10.9% in 2021. Public debt was moderate at 21.5% of GDP in 2023, while external debt fell from 66.3% in 2020 to 38.7% in 2023 thanks to IMF debt relief and rising mining revenues. Still, debt servicing consumes 14% of government revenue, crowding out investment in social programs and infrastructure.

Fiscal transparency is undermined by opaque military and intelligence budgets, including \$450 million in unaccounted security spending since 2021, and by the exclusion of major state-owned enterprises such as Gécamines from official budget documents.

Structural weaknesses also weigh heavily. The informal economy, employing 82% of the workforce, erodes the tax base. Credit to GDP remains stagnant at 3.2%, with only marginal improvement in non-performing loans, from 9.2% in 2020 to 8.3% in 2023. Heavy dependence on mining, which generates 70% of export earnings, leaves fiscal stability highly vulnerable to commodity price swings.

The IMF's \$1.5 billion Extended Credit Facility (2023–2026) includes reforms to strengthen SOE audits, modernize customs, and improve transparency in military budgets. Digital tax collection platforms such as Sigida-Taxe boosted non-mining revenues by 18% in 2023, while the World Bank's \$700 million DRC Governance Reform Project (2022–2027) aims to reinforce fiscal oversight.

Although the DRC has made progress in narrowing deficits and reducing debt, persistent opacity, election-driven spending, and overreliance on extractive revenues continue to threaten long-term fiscal stability.

9 | Private Property

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) recognizes property rights in its constitution (Chapter 2, Articles 34–40) and is a signatory to international agreements such as the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) accord. In practice, however, enforcement is inconsistent, hampered by corruption, judicial inefficiency and administrative opacity.

Elite expropriation is widespread, with politically connected figures – including allies of the president and senior military officers – frequently seizing private assets. In 2023, the Kinshasa Archdiocese reported land grabs targeting church-run schools and hospitals. The government retains control of 90% of arable land and most prime urban real estate, while private ownership often depends on opaque approvals from the Agence Nationale des Titres Immobiliers (ANTI), which lacks transparency.

Property rights

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Judicial dysfunction is a major issue: property disputes take an average of 1,250 days to resolve, and political interference frequently overturns rulings. Mining and agricultural firms face further uncertainty through arbitrary contract revisions. In 2023, Canadian miner Alphamin Resources sued after its permit for the Bisie tin mine was revoked.

Land insecurity is particularly acute in urban areas, where more than 70% of residents lack formal titles, fueling disputes in cities like Lubumbashi and rebel-held Goma. Intellectual property protections are equally weak: counterfeit goods make up 40% of pharmaceuticals and 60% of consumer electronics, yet no prosecutions have been recorded. The DRC ranked 129th of 131 countries in the 2023 International Property Rights Index, reflecting the fragility of both physical and intellectual property protections.

The DRC also scores poorly on global corruption indices, with land administration identified as a high-risk sector. A digital land registry pilot has been launched in Kinshasa to reduce bureaucratic delays, but coverage remains limited. Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA's) revised commercial laws have introduced stricter penalties for IP theft, though enforcement is still at an early stage.

The World Bank's \$500 million DRC Urban Resilience Project aims to formalize land tenure for 200,000 households by 2026. Yet despite these initiatives, systemic corruption, elite impunity and institutional fragility leave property rights largely ineffective for ordinary citizens and businesses. Strengthening judicial independence, depoliticizing land governance and expanding digital reforms remain critical to securing property rights and attracting investment.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has introduced reforms to attract private investment, including updates to its commercial codes and restructuring of agencies such as the National Investment Promotion Agency (ANAPI). ANAPI's "one-stop shop" reduced company incorporation time from 24 days in 2020 to 7 days (World Bank, 2023). Foreign and domestic ownership is largely unrestricted, except in strategic sectors such as mining, where 2023 amendments mandated a 10% state equity stake. The DRC's 2022 accession to the East African Community (EAC) aims to harmonize trade policies and promote cross-border investment.

Persistent obstacles, however, undermine these efforts. Infrastructure remains severely limited: only 20% of the population has access to electricity (AfDB, 2023) and just 3% of roads are paved, driving up operational costs. Credit to the private sector is just 3.2% of GDP (IMF, 2024), while interest rates range from 18–25%. About 85% of businesses operate informally to avoid arbitrary fees and "ghost taxes" (World Bank, 2023). Privatization frequently benefits politically connected elites, as illustrated by the controversial 2023 sale of Société Nationale d'Électricité assets. Weak institutions and corruption continue to weigh heavily, reflected in the DRC's

Private enterprise

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ranking of 140th of 141 in the 2023 Global Competitiveness Index. Property seizures remain a further risk, exemplified by the 2024 case in which agribusiness Feronia Inc. lost 12,000 hectares to a military-backed entity.

Sector-specific challenges are pronounced. In mining, despite the DRC's role as a leading global supplier of cobalt, investors face unpredictable contract and permit revocations, such as the 2023 dispute over Ivanhoe Mines' Kipushi Project. In agriculture, only 10% of arable land is formally titled, deterring large-scale investment. Tech entrepreneurs face additional hurdles, from low internet penetration (under 25%) to entrenched bureaucratic obstacles.

The DRC ratified the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) in 2022, yet by 2024 only 15% of firms were participating. Digital reforms, such as ANAPI's e-Registry platform, have reduced bribery risks by 30% (UNDP, 2023). Meanwhile, the World Bank's \$200 million DRC Entrepreneurship Project (2023 – 2027) is targeting SME financing and skills development.

While regulatory reforms suggest a push toward economic liberalization, corruption, infrastructure deficits and elite capture continue to undercut private enterprise in the DRC.

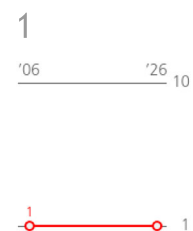
10 | Welfare Regime

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) lacks effective state-sponsored social safety nets. The National Social Security Fund (CNSS), designed to cover formal sector workers, is crippled by mismanagement and underfunding. As of 2023, only 12% of formal workers – mostly state employees – were enrolled, and fewer than 5% received timely benefits. Pension arrears exceed \$200 million, leaving many retirees without income for years (World Bank, 2023). Public health spending accounts for just 3.1% of GDP (WHO, 2024), while 75% of citizens rely on out-of-pocket payments for medical care.

Conflict in the east, displacement and climate shocks have deepened the crisis. By January 2025, more than 7 million people were internally displaced (UNHCR) – the highest figure in Africa. A total of 25.4 million people required urgent humanitarian assistance, including 8.1 million children suffering from acute malnutrition (OCHA, 2024). Violence has disrupted agriculture across 14 provinces, while 82% of households continue to depend on subsistence farming or informal trade (FAO, 2023).

Relief efforts remain limited. Churches, NGOs and international agencies provide some support, with Caritas Congo reaching 2 million people annually with food and health care – just 30% of the need. The 2024 DRC Humanitarian Response Plan requested \$2.6 billion but was only 18% funded by May 2024. Mining firms such as Glencore and China Molybdenum support local schools and clinics, but these initiatives are fragmented and concentrated near their operations.

Social safety nets



Social protection accounts for only 0.8% of the national budget, most of which is directed to security and elite patronage. A 2023 audit revealed \$48 million in CNSS funds misused for political campaigns. Moreover, 90% of aid is directed to conflict zones, leaving urban poverty in cities like Kinshasa and Lubumbashi largely unaddressed.

International partners are attempting to fill the gap. The World Bank's \$300 million Social Protection Project (2023–2027) aims to provide cash transfers to 200,000 vulnerable households in Kasai and Kivu. The EU's Bekolo Niosi Program funds trauma care and vocational training for 15,000 ex-combatants and displaced persons. Mobile money platforms such as Orange Money now channel 40% of NGO aid, helping to reduce leakage.

The DRC's social safety net crisis reflects systemic governance failures and a fractured social contract. While international aid and digital innovations provide partial relief, durable solutions will require political will to reform institutions like the CNSS, prioritize social spending and address the root causes of conflict.

Although the DRC's constitution (Article 13) guarantees equal opportunity, systemic nepotism, ethnic favoritism and political patronage dominate social mobility. Success typically depends on ties to the president's inner circle, military elites or influential ethnic networks, leaving merit-based advancement nearly impossible. Institutions meant to support marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities or ethnic minorities, are either underfunded or absent.

Women and girls face entrenched barriers across every sector. As of 2023, women held only 26.2% of parliamentary seats, reflecting a gender gap of 47.6% in political representation. Female tertiary enrollment stagnated at 32% (UNESCO, 2023), while dropout rates rose due to child marriage, with 37% of girls marrying before age 18 (UNICEF). The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report ranked the DRC 144th of 146 countries, citing a 29% gender pay gap and limited access to formal employment. More than 1.2 million women in conflict-affected eastern provinces reported sexual violence in 2023, with impunity rates exceeding 98% (UN Women).

Customary law in many rural areas reinforces patriarchal norms, denying women inheritance rights in 60% of cases (World Bank, 2023). Although the 2022 Labor Code prohibits gender discrimination, 72% of women remain concentrated in informal, unprotected work (ILO).

Ethnic minorities, particularly Indigenous Twa and Pygmy communities, suffer from widespread land dispossession, with fewer than 1% holding formal land titles. Access for people with disabilities is equally limited: fewer than 5% receive education or vocational training (DRC Ministry of Social Affairs, 2023).

Legal and policy frameworks exist but remain weakly enforced. The 2023 Gender Parity Law mandates 30% female representation in public office by 2030, yet implementation is minimal. The U.N. Spotlight Initiative allocated \$50 million

Equal opportunity

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(2022–2025) to address gender-based violence, though just 12% of funds reached local NGOs. The World Bank’s DRC Women’s Empowerment Project aims to provide 500,000 women with microloans and legal aid by 2026.

The DRC’s stark gender and equality gaps expose the disconnect between constitutional promises and daily realities shaped by corruption, conflict and deeply entrenched patriarchal power structures.

11 | Economic Performance

Despite conflict in the east, spillovers from the Russia–Ukraine war and post-pandemic recovery pressures, the DRC’s economy has shown resilience, driven largely by mining and strategic reforms.

Real GDP grew 8.4% in 2023, following a peak of 8.9% in 2022. Mining expanded by 18.2%, accounting for more than 70% of overall growth. Non-extractive sectors grew 4.2% in 2022, led by telecommunications and renewable energy, while agriculture slowed to 2.2% in 2023. Growth is projected to moderate to 6.2% in 2024 and stabilize around 4.8% in 2025–26 as mining decelerates. Agriculture, which employs more than 60% of the workforce, remains highly vulnerable to climate shocks such as floods and droughts.

Cobalt prices fluctuated between \$33,000 and \$50,000 per ton in 2023, reflecting volatility in the EV market and affecting revenues. New ventures, including the \$6.2 billion Sicominex copper–cobalt project with China, are expected to boost output.

Inflation peaked at 15.6% in mid-2023 before easing to 12.3% by year’s end after aggressive monetary tightening. The central bank raised its policy rate to 25% to stabilize the Congolese franc (CDF), which depreciated 19% against the U.S. dollar. Foreign exchange reserves reached \$4.1 billion, covering 3.2 months of imports, supported by mining receipts and IMF programs.

Official unemployment stood at 4.5% in 2023, little changed from 4.6% in 2022, but such figures have limited meaning in an economy dominated by the informal sector.

Structural vulnerabilities persist. The economy remains exposed to commodity price swings and to China, which absorbs 45% of mineral exports. IMF programs mandate anti-corruption reforms, including audits of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Non-performing loans fell to 8.2% in 2023, yet credit access remains limited at 3.5% of GDP. GDP per capita stagnated at \$660 in 2023, far below regional peers such as Gabon (\$8,630) and Cameroon (\$1,610).

AfCFTA membership offers opportunities for export diversification, but non-extractive sectors face severe constraints, from poor infrastructure – only 3% of roads are paved – to limited investment. Mobile money use rose to 34% in 2023, improving financial inclusion, particularly in rural areas.

Output strength

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The DRC's economy continues to rely heavily on mineral wealth, leaving it vulnerable to external shocks and elite capture. IMF-backed reforms and regional partnerships point to progress, but sustainable growth will depend on diversification, stronger governance and investment in human capital.

12 | Sustainability

The DRC contains the world's second-largest rainforest, spanning 155 million hectares – 60% of the Congo Basin – and storing 8% of global forest carbon. Its rich biodiversity includes more than 10,000 animal species, including endangered gorillas, okapis and forest elephants. The Congo River, the planet's deepest, sustains 75 million people, while Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, functions as a vital carbon sink. Yet despite this ecological wealth, the DRC lacks a coherent institutional framework for environmental protection.

The 2002 Forestry Code and 2011 Environmental Protection Law remain weakly enforced, and the Congolese Environment Agency (ACE) is underfunded and politically sidelined. Although the 2018 Mining Code requires environmental impact assessments, Global Witness reported that 85% of mining permits in 2023 operated without compliance. The government's 2023 decision to auction 27 oil blocks – including sites in Virunga and carbon-rich peatlands storing 30 billion tons of CO₂ – provoked international outcry. Deforestation surged to 1.2 million hectares in 2023, the fastest rate in Africa (Global Forest Watch).

Drivers of degradation are clear: 90% of timber is harvested illegally, often linked to military elites (Environmental Investigation Agency, 2023); slash-and-burn agriculture, fueled by annual population growth of 6.4%, accounts for 72% of deforestation; and armed groups in the east profit from the charcoal and bushmeat trade. The DRC also remains a hub for ivory, pangolin scales and rare timber, despite its obligations under CITES. Attempts to monetize its forests include a \$500 million carbon-offset deal with the UAE's Blue Carbon in 2023, criticized as “green colonialism.” Meanwhile, oil and coal ventures such as the Luena Basin project threaten to release an estimated 4.2 gigatons of CO₂ (Rainforest Foundation, 2024). Global Witness has implicated 15 senior officials in illegal logging and mining operations.

Despite a 2023 moratorium on new logging permits, concessions already cover 22 million hectares, with enforcement effectively absent. Some progress has come from grassroots efforts: Pygmy communities, supported by NGOs such as RRN, won three landmark court cases against land grabs in 2023. The government pledged €130 million (2023–2027) for sustainable forestry, though concerns remain over misallocation.

Environmental
policy

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The DRC's environmental policy embodies a paradox: extraordinary natural wealth coexists with systemic governance failures, elite predation and climate hypocrisy. While international partnerships and community resistance provide glimmers of hope, only deep reforms can reconcile economic development with environmental sustainability.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faces systemic challenges in education and research, with infrastructure among the most under-resourced in the world. Universities, schools and research centers concentrated in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Kisangani struggle with outdated facilities, poorly equipped laboratories, inadequate libraries and a shortage of trained educators. As of 2023, government spending on education stood at just 2.7% of GDP, well below UNESCO's recommended minimum of 4 – 6% for developing nations.

Approximately 71% of primary schools and 63.8% of secondary schools are privately managed, nearly 80% of them by the Catholic Church. This reliance on private providers exacerbates inequities, leaving rural and low-income communities with limited access to quality, affordable schooling.

The government introduced free primary education in 2019, which sharply increased enrollment. The gross primary enrollment ratio rose to 124% by 2020 – up 50% from the previous decade. Yet overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages and scarce learning materials quickly strained the system.

Although the share of the national budget allocated to education rose from 11.6% in 2017 to 21.8% in 2021, and the country secured a \$1 billion World Bank grant (2021–2025), progress is undermined by corruption and mismanagement. Transparency International and local NGOs have documented widespread embezzlement of funds. Teachers face delayed salaries, frequent strikes and limited opportunities for professional development.

Research and development (R&D) is also critically underfunded, with government investment at just 0.41% of GDP in 2022 – among the lowest globally. While Congolese researchers demonstrated ingenuity during the COVID-19 pandemic by creating low-cost ventilators, systemic underfunding, outdated laboratories and weak collaboration frameworks continue to hinder long-term progress.

The free primary education policy marked an important step, but systemic underfunding, governance failures and reliance on outdated models constrain progress – particularly in secondary and tertiary education.

Education policy /
R&D

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Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

The DRC faces entrenched structural challenges in governance, rooted in decades of instability, inequality and institutional fragility. Despite vast natural wealth – including 60–70% of global cobalt reserves, large deposits of copper, coltan, diamonds and uranium, and the world’s second-largest rainforest – the country remains trapped in underdevelopment, conflict and weak state capacity.

More than 73% of the population lives below the international poverty line of \$2.15 per day, with stark inequality between urban elites and rural communities (World Bank, 2023). The DRC ranks 179th of 193 countries on the Human Development Index (2023), underscoring deep deficits in education, health care and livelihoods.

The country’s vast territory of 2.3 million km² suffers from poor infrastructure, with fewer than 3% of roads paved. Weak connectivity undermines governance, economic integration and emergency response, particularly in conflict zones such as North Kivu and Ituri.

The education system is dysfunctional, leaving 26% of adults illiterate (UNESCO, 2022) and producing a severe shortage of skilled workers. Fewer than 5% of young people complete tertiary education, stifling innovation and weakening public sector capacity.

Conflict persists, with more than 120 armed groups active in the east and 6.9 million people internally displaced (UNHCR, 2024) – the largest displacement crisis in Africa. Corruption is endemic: 88% of citizens believe public officials are corrupt (Transparency International, 2023).

Health challenges are also severe. The DRC accounts for 25% of global malaria deaths and experiences recurrent outbreaks of Ebola, measles and cholera. The health care system is critically under-resourced, with only 0.3 physicians per 1,000 people (WHO, 2023). Meanwhile, climate change and illegal resource extraction threaten biodiversity and deepen food insecurity in rural areas.

A culture of patronage prioritizes political survival over public service, diverting resource revenues to elites. The \$24 billion mining sector remains opaque, with minimal benefits reaching local populations.

Structural
constraints

10



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These factors reinforce a vicious cycle: weak infrastructure constrains resource monetization and service delivery, fueling informality and conflict, deepening poverty and eroding trust in institutions. Poor health and education outcomes further weaken human capital, reduce productivity and strain public finances.

The DRC's governance crisis does not stem from a lack of resources but from systemic mismanagement, entrenched patronage, historical legacies and distortions in global commodity markets.

Civil society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has deep roots in the country's history of resistance and activism, particularly during the struggle against Mobutu Sese Seko in the 1990s. At the National Conference in the early 1990s, women's associations, student movements, human rights groups and church leaders played a pivotal role in political negotiations, pressing for reforms and challenging Mobutu's rule. This activism helped establish a more organized civil society than in many neighboring states.

Yet in the decades since, civil society has faced significant setbacks. Prolonged war, militarization and state-sponsored repression have eroded independence and the effectiveness of many organizations, thereby undermining social trust. Many groups that once mobilized against dictatorship have become politicized, mirroring the country's broader structural problems of ethnic fragmentation, patronage and reliance on outside funding. The growing dependence on donor programs has created further distortions: in periods of heightened international attention, NGOs proliferate to tap external resources, often prioritizing issues aligned with donor agendas over grassroots needs. As a result, civil society's autonomy has at times been compromised by external influence.

Still, committed organizations continue to operate across the country, particularly at the grassroots level in conflict zones, where they work on human rights, peacebuilding and social justice. Facing government hostility toward critical voices, many – including religious groups – avoid overt political dissent. Instead, they concentrate on lower-profile social issues such as education, health care and community development, seeking to serve their communities while minimizing the risk of repression.

Youth movements such as LUCHA have stood out as vocal critics of government inaction, especially in the face of escalating violence and human rights abuses in the east. They have demanded accountability not only from Congolese authorities but also from international actors, including the U.N. peacekeeping mission MONUSCO, and remain prominent voices for reform.

Despite this resilience, civil society in the DRC remains fragile. Most organizations lack the resources, capacity and independence to challenge entrenched power structures effectively. Dependent on domestic patronage or international support, they struggle to operate autonomously and to address the systemic challenges confronting the country.

Civil society traditions

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The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continually features complex and tragic conflicts, heavily influenced by historical ethnic divisions, regional rivalries and economic motives surrounding the country's vast natural resources. The conflict has escalated in recent years, particularly with the resurgence of the M23 rebel group, which gained control of key cities such as Goma in eastern DRC in January 2025, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The ongoing violence, displacement and loss of life highlight the entrenched instability in the region. The involvement of armed groups such as M23, FDLR and ADF adds to the complexity of the conflict. These groups operate with varying objectives – some are driven by political ideologies, while others are fueled by economic incentives such as the exploitation of the DRC's valuable minerals like coltan, gold and cobalt. The Congolese National Army (FARDC), which is supposed to ensure peace and security, has itself been complicit in the conflict, plagued by inefficiency, corruption and shifting alliances with rebel groups, further contributing to the volatility. The United Nations Peacekeeping Mission (MONUSCO) has struggled to fulfill its mandate, facing sharp criticism for failing to protect civilians or prevent atrocities. Despite being one of the world's largest peacekeeping operations, MONUSCO's record is mixed, with many Congolese feeling unprotected and abandoned.

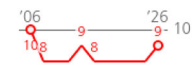
Regional initiatives such as the Nairobi Agreement (2022), the deployment of the East African Community (EAC) Intervention Brigade, the SADC peacekeeping mission and parallel Angolan-led talks have shown some promise. Yet violence persists, and the outcome of these efforts remains uncertain. The FARDC continues to lose ground as the Rwandan-backed M23 advances toward Kisangani and Katanga after seizing much of North and South Kivu, including the provincial capitals Goma and Bukavu. Ethnic and regional divisions further exacerbate the conflict. Resource disputes, land tensions and ethnic discrimination fuel community clashes, deepening polarization and mistrust. These challenges go beyond territorial control and cut into the social fabric of Congolese society, complicating peacebuilding.

Economic incentives are equally central. The DRC's vast mineral wealth, critical for global technology and energy industries, attracts armed groups and external actors who exploit these resources to fund operations. Porous borders with Rwanda and Uganda facilitate the movement of fighters, weapons and contraband, undermining stabilization efforts.

In sum, the DRC's conflict is a complex crisis with no easy solution. Regional peace initiatives and international involvement continue, but entrenched ethnic divisions, resource-driven violence and ineffective governance leave a long-term resolution elusive. Millions remain trapped in cycles of displacement, insecurity and humanitarian crisis.

Conflict intensity

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II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faces profound governance challenges, characterized by systemic corruption, weak institutional capacity and a significant gap between policy rhetoric and actual implementation. Despite its abundant natural resources, including cobalt, copper and diamonds, the government's ability to foster socioeconomic development remains critically impaired.

The Congolese state lacks the technical expertise, administrative infrastructure and political will to effectively prioritize the goals set out in development plans. President Félix Tshisekedi, re-elected in December 2023, has repeatedly promised reforms since his first inauguration in 2019. His initial 100-day program focused on infrastructure – road construction, water access, electrification – and social services such as health care and education. However, progress has been limited: less than 15% of planned roads have been completed and only 30% of the population has access to electricity, with rural electrification rates under 10% (World Bank, 2023).

The 2019 – 2023 National Strategic Development Plan (PNSD), which aimed to foster economic growth, human capital and environmental sustainability, also faltered, with less than 20% of its targets achieved. Bureaucratic inertia and widespread embezzlement were key factors in this failure.

Tshisekedi's flagship initiative, the PDL-145T (Local Development Program for 145 Territories), repackaged in 2022, promises grassroots development through decentralized projects. Yet, as of 2023, fewer than 10% of its initiatives have been fully realized. Local officials report that allocated funds are frequently siphoned off by elites or redirected to politically connected contractors.

The government's development agendas, including the PDL-145T, are widely seen as vehicles for securing foreign aid rather than actionable plans. Notable examples include a \$1.5 billion IMF Extended Credit Facility (ECF), approved in 2021 and contingent on governance reforms. By 2023, the IMF noted "limited progress" on anti-corruption measures. The World Bank's \$5.3 billion portfolio for the DRC (2020 – 2025) is facing scrutiny due to management risks. Donors increasingly tie funding to transparency benchmarks, but enforcement remains weak. The Kinshasa-Brazzaville Road Corridor project, backed by the African Development Bank, has suffered repeated delays and cost overruns linked to corruption.

Question
Score

Prioritization

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While the DRC holds 70% of the world's cobalt reserves – critical for renewable energy – mining revenues rarely benefit local populations. Armed groups and foreign corporations exploit weak governance to control extraction sites, perpetuating conflict and deepening inequality.

In general, entrenched patronage systems and the country's dependence on extractive industries for short-term revenue continue to pose significant obstacles to meaningful reform.

The DRC continues to grapple with profound governance failures that are marked by a stark disconnect between policy rhetoric and tangible implementation. Despite President Félix Tshisekedi's repeated reform-oriented pledges, systemic corruption, institutional incapacity and elite disinterest have rendered most development initiatives ineffective.

The government's commitment to sustainable development remains largely performative. High-profile initiatives such as the 100-Day Program (2019) and the PDL-145T Territorial Districts Plan (revived in 2022) prioritize visible yet superficial prestige projects – such as road construction and health facilities – to signal progress. However, as of 2023, only 12% of PDL-145T projects have been completed, according to the Congolese Court of Auditors.

The promise of free elementary education, a key campaign pledge in 2018, remains unfulfilled in 70% of rural areas due to mismanaged funds, teacher shortages and poor implementation. Over \$150 million allocated for infrastructure projects between 2020 and 2023 was embezzled, leading to the arrest of 23 senior officials, including provincial governors, in 2023 alone. The Kinshasa – Goma Highway project, which was budgeted at \$1.2 billion, stalled in 2023 after audits revealed that \$320 million had been diverted to offshore accounts.

A critical shortage of skilled personnel continues to undermine the state's capacity. Only 8% of civil servants in infrastructure roles possess the relevant qualifications (World Bank, 2023). Meanwhile, the national budget remains misaligned, with less than 15% directed toward poverty reduction while defense and elite patronage networks receive disproportionate funding.

The DRC remains heavily donor-dependent, with international donors financing 40% of public investments. However, many projects lack local ownership and funds are often mismanaged. For example, the World Bank suspended a \$500 million education grant in 2023 due to evidence of fund diversion.

Short-term fiscal adjustments, such as the 2022 fuel subsidy cuts, were implemented to satisfy the IMF but reversed amid public unrest, further undermining the country's ability to plan for long-term development.

Implementation

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The security sector continues to suffer from dysfunction. The FARDC (national army) remains underpaid, undertrained and often collaborates with militias. A 2023 U.N. report highlighted that 60% of FARDC units in North Kivu were “unfit for combat.” The judiciary is similarly hampered by corruption, with only 2% of embezzlement cases resulting in convictions (DRC Anti-Corruption League, 2023).

Powerful networks, including Tshisekedi’s Sacred Union coalition, continue to prioritize rent-seeking behavior over reform. Revisions to the 2023 mining code intended to increase state revenue were heavily diluted after lobbying by foreign firms, further perpetuating the resource curse.

The DRC continues to face profound governance challenges that perpetuate underdevelopment and stifle meaningful progress, including a lack of willingness and capacity for policy learning.

Governance structures lack independent oversight or accountability mechanisms, leaving policy failures unchecked. A 2023 report by the National Audit Office found that a staggering 80% of state projects undergo no post-implementation review, entrenching inefficiency and mismanagement.

High-profile failures illustrate the pattern. The \$1.5 billion Kinshasa–Goma Highway collapsed in 2023 after heavy rains exposed substandard materials and large-scale embezzlement. Similarly, the Boulevard Triomphal project in Kinshasa (2022) revealed contractor mismanagement and corruption. In both cases, politically connected contractors were quietly replaced, and the absence of comprehensive audits ensured that such failures were repeated. One of the most ambitious projects touted by the government, the PDL-145 (Local Development Program for 145 Territories), aimed to foster development across 145 territorial districts. However, by 2024, less than 15% of the intended projects such as schools and health care facilities were operational. Notably, \$220 million earmarked for these projects was siphoned off by ghost companies, according to the Congo Research Group – evidence of elite capture undermining grassroots development.

The mining sector, crucial to the DRC’s economy, remains a flashpoint for corruption. In 2023, Minister of Mines Antoinette N’Samba annulled 12 contracts signed by her predecessor, citing corruption. However, these contracts were quickly re-awarded to companies linked to the ruling coalition, undermining the integrity of the sector and discouraging foreign investment. This reflects a pattern seen in the renegotiation of the Sicomines Agreement with the Chinese consortium, where IMF pressure for greater revenue transparency produced limited results. These setbacks suggest the continued impunity enjoyed by elites in the mining sector, which lies at the core of the DRC’s extractive governance model.

Policy learning

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The DRC's higher education system remains severely underfunded, with universities receiving less than 1% of the national budget. Scholars critical of government policies face significant censorship. In 2023, for example, a governance study at Kinshasa University that challenged the government's mining policies was suspended. This reflects a broader pattern in which dissenting voices are marginalized and intellectual independence is undermined, leaving the government to control the narrative and avoid scrutiny.

In 2023, the DRC secured a \$1.7 billion loan from the IMF, contingent on the implementation of anti-corruption measures. However, the government backtracked on critical reforms, including auditing military expenditures, which undermined the credibility of these commitments. The Anti-Corruption Court created the same year has so far targeted only low-level officials, while senior figures implicated in major scandals – such as the \$150 million Congo River Port Scandal – remain untouched. This selective justice reinforces the entrenched impunity for the political and military elite in the DRC.

The DRC's extractive governance model prioritizes resource exploitation over the provision of public goods. While the country holds vast mineral wealth, especially in cobalt, more than 70% of mining revenues fail to reach state coffers. Instead, military and political elites control large amounts of wealth, with \$4 billion in offshore assets – a sum greater than the national health budget of \$300 million (Panama Papers, 2023). This reflects the disparity between the DRC's resource wealth and the impoverished state of its population.

15 | Resource Efficiency

The DRC faces significant challenges in effectively managing its vast natural resources, despite immense mineral wealth. The country is plagued by systemic governance failures, including corruption, political instability and elite capture. As a result, 35% of the population lives below the poverty line and only 26% has access to basic health care (World Bank, 2023).

Corruption undermines the DRC's capacity to collect revenue, with an estimated \$1.5 billion lost annually to tax evasion (IMF, 2023). Key agencies such as the Direction Générale des Impôts (DGI) are plagued by embezzlement, while political interference in civil service appointments weakens institutional capacity. More than 60% of public service appointments are based on political connections rather than merit (DRC Ministry of Public Service, 2022), which severely limits the government's ability to manage resources efficiently. The public sector is further hindered by an aging and under-skilled workforce. Only 12% of civil servants are under the age of 35, while 70% of the national population falls within this age group (UNDP, 2023). This inefficiency stems from the patronage system, which prioritizes political loyalty over qualifications and prevents skilled individuals from filling key positions, thus impairing the delivery of public services.

Efficient use of assets

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The security sector absorbs 15% of the national budget – three times the combined allocation for education and health care (DRC Finance Law, 2024). Ongoing conflicts and political reliance on the military sustain these costs. Despite peace initiatives, parallel military budgets and “ghost soldiers” divert funds away from essential development priorities. Oversight bodies such as the Inspection Générale des Finances (IGF) and the Cour des Comptes lack the independence and resources needed to function effectively. While the IGF recovered \$120 million in embezzled funds in 2023, fewer than 10% of corruption cases result in convictions, allowing a culture of impunity to persist. Legal harassment of civil society organizations further weakens accountability mechanisms.

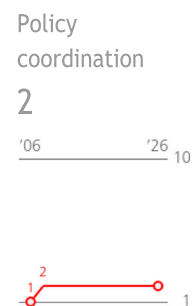
More than 30% of public expenditures are nondiscretionary, limiting funds available for development projects. Investigations have uncovered parallel budgets and offshore accounts linked to senior officials that further drain the country’s resources. Provincial governments, which are entitled to 15% of national revenues, frequently face liquidity crises that stall local development and deepen inequality.

The DRC relies on foreign aid for 45% of public investment (OECD, 2024). Yet donor-driven projects often reflect external priorities, and conditions attached to financing – such as those in the \$1.2 billion IMF Extended Credit Facility (2023) – risk exacerbating poverty. Meanwhile, foreign dominance of the mining sector means just 10% of profits remain in the country (Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2024), curbing the state’s ability to leverage its resources for sustainable growth.

The governance framework of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains defined by hyper-presidentialism, with nearly all policy decisions, implementation strategies and oversight concentrated in the presidency. This centralization of power – rooted in the Mobutu era – has deepened under President Félix Tshisekedi, despite his early pledges to decentralize authority. As of 2024, some 85% of strategic decisions, from resource contracts to security operations, are made unilaterally by the presidency or its informal networks, bypassing formal institutions altogether (Crisis Group, 2023).

The executive dominates virtually every dimension of governance, reducing ministries, provincial administrations and even the judiciary to extensions of presidential authority. Parliament functions largely as a rubber stamp, approving 90% of presidential directives, with legislators initiating just 2% of laws (DRC Parliamentary Observatory, 2023). High-profile cases – such as the 2023 authorization of oil exploration in Virunga National Park – underscore the subordination of legal and environmental considerations to executive priorities, thus raising questions about the integrity of the decision-making process.

Despite constitutional guarantees of decentralization, provincial governors remain financially dependent on Kinshasa. As of 2024, the central government retained control of 80% of provincial budgets, limiting the capacity of local administrations



to prioritize regional development (World Bank, 2024). This financial dependence on the presidency undermines efforts to address local needs and exacerbates the marginalization of provincial governments.

Informal presidential networks, including the Cabinet Civil and Cabinet Militaire, routinely bypass ministries. Mining contracts, for instance, are negotiated directly by presidential advisers, sidelining the Ministry of Mines and other agencies. The lack of coordination and transparency fuels inefficiency and corruption, particularly in strategic sectors.

An audit in 2023 revealed that 17 government agencies with overlapping mandates in land management created bureaucratic deadlock, delaying infrastructure projects and generating opportunities for bribery (DRC Anti-Corruption Commission). Such duplication fosters confusion, obstructs progress and feeds corruption.

Where consolidation of power is concerned, however, the presidency proves highly effective. The 2023 imprisonment of opposition figure Salomon Kalonda Della on dubious charges demonstrated how courts, police and intelligence services can act in concert to suppress dissent. During the same year's elections, provincial governors, state media and civil servants openly campaigned for Tshisekedi in violation of electoral laws, yet no sanctions followed (CENI Observer Report, 2024). This coordinated political machinery illustrates the extent to which the presidency has consolidated its grip on power.

Control over state resources further entrenches power. Opaque financial instruments such as the Fonds de Promotion de l'Industrie are used to channel funds to loyalists in parliament and provincial assemblies. Through this strategic distribution of resources, Tshisekedi has secured the loyalty of key figures and reinforced his hold on power.

Despite President Félix Tshisekedi's public pledge to combat corruption – a central theme of his 2018 campaign – the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains mired in systemic graft. Legal reforms such as the 2021 Anti-Corruption Law and the revitalization of oversight bodies like the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) suggest incremental progress, but structural impunity, political capture and entrenched rent-seeking continue to block meaningful accountability.

Corruption extends beyond government institutions into the financing of politics itself. Party and campaign funding remain major sources of abuse, with public resources routinely diverted to bankroll political campaigns. This misuse undermines democratic processes and entrenches patronage networks. Although laws regulate political financing, weak enforcement and scant transparency render them largely ineffective.

The IGF, under Director General Jules Alingete Key, has made some headway, recovering \$120 million in embezzled funds in 2023 and exposing scandals such as the Congo Futur housing project fraud. Yet its efforts falter when presidential allies

Anti-corruption
policy

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are implicated. A Kinshasa court, for example, dismissed charges against a presidential adviser accused of embezzling \$50 million in a fuel procurement scheme, citing insufficient evidence. Such selective justice underscores the political interference that hobbles anti-corruption initiatives.

The presidency's dominance over oversight bodies such as the IGF and the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) further erodes credibility. Critics argue these institutions are often weaponized against opposition figures rather than used to advance reform. Procurement remains a major vulnerability: in 2023, more than 60% of government contracts were awarded without competitive bidding, typically benefiting companies tied to political elites. Flagship projects, such as the Bukanga Lonzo agro-industrial park, lost \$150 million to mismanagement and corruption, with little accountability.

The mining sector, which provides 70% of global cobalt supply, is especially prone to abuse. Contracts approved under Tshisekedi's presidency have been linked to bribery and regulatory bypasses. A 2024 Global Witness investigation revealed that foreign firms including Glencore and China Molybdenum secured lucrative exemptions through bribes, which on average equaled 12% of operational costs – often cheaper than navigating the country's bureaucracy.

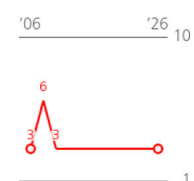
Despite these challenges, the DRC has made some progress. The DRC joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2022, though compliance remains weak. Efforts to curb corruption at the lower levels may appease donors, but they fail to tackle the deeper, systemic issues that perpetuate a culture of impunity. As long as political financing remains opaque and corruption entrenches governance, meaningful reform will remain out of reach.

16 | Consensus-Building

Despite systemic dysfunction, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) maintains formal democratic structures – elections, a constitution and nominal separation of powers – primarily to preserve international legitimacy and donor support. With foreign aid accounting for 45% of the 2024 budget, adherence to democratic norms has become a fiscal necessity. Yet institutions such as the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) face accusations of bias. The December 2023 elections, marred by logistical failures, voter suppression and alleged collusion between CENI and Tshisekedi's coalition, were deemed “neither free nor fair” by the EU Election Observation Mission. Confidence in electoral institutions has collapsed, with only 12% of Congolese expressing trust, according to a 2023 African Union report. The Tshisekedi administration continues to focus on securing its political dominance. Tactics include co-opting rivals through appointments, such as integrating Jean-Pierre Bemba into the ruling coalition; weaponizing anti-corruption campaigns against critics, as in the 2024 arrest of opposition Senator Francine Muyumba on questionable embezzlement charges; and leveraging the eastern

Consensus on goals

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security crisis to justify delaying the decentralization promised in the 2006 constitution. Western donors regularly condemn democratic backsliding, but their influence is blunted by competing interests. The DRC supplies cobalt and copper critical to global supply chains and serves as a counter-terrorism partner in Central Africa. Thus, while the U.S. downgraded the DRC to an “authoritarian regime” in its 2024 Global Democracy Index, Washington continued military aid under the Global Fragility Act. The IMF released a 2024 loan tranche despite governance benchmarks being missed – underscoring how geopolitical priorities often outweigh democratic accountability.

Despite rhetorical commitments to development, the government has failed to implement economic policies that generate broad-based growth or employment. Unemployment stands at 46.1% (World Bank, 2023), with youth joblessness above 65%, reflecting the gulf between stated goals and practical outcomes. Political elites across factions – both Tshisekedi’s Union Sacrée and the opposition – endorse market principles in public but prioritize rent-seeking over reform. An IMF report in 2023 noted that fewer than 15% of public investments align with the government’s own development plans, due to elite capture of state resources. International pressure from partners like the IMF, World Bank, and African Development Bank (AfDB) has forced some paper reforms. In 2023, Kinshasa agreed to a \$1.5 billion IMF Extended Credit Facility tied to privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and improved tax collection. The country also joined the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Yet progress is minimal: in the World Bank’s 2024 Doing Business Index, the DRC ranked 183rd of 190 economies, hindered by bureaucracy, arbitrary regulation and entrenched elite resistance to competition. Enforcement of the 2018 Mining Code remains inconsistent, with \$2 billion in unpaid royalties reported in 2023 (Natural Resource Governance Institute). Privatization of Gécamines has stalled amid political infighting over lucrative contracts. A liberal market threatens the patronage networks sustaining the elite. In 2023, leaked documents revealed Ministry of Mines officials awarding permits to shell companies linked to presidential advisers, bypassing competitive bidding. An African Development Bank audit in 2024 found \$750 million in mining taxes waived or diverted through opaque “strategic partnerships.” While all factions agree on broad goals – infrastructure, education, health care – implementation is crippled by mismanagement and corruption. Notable failures include the Free Primary Education Initiative, launched in 2019 with \$1.2 billion in World Bank support, faced a \$300 million shortfall in 2023 due to embezzlement, leaving 4 million children without access. The PDL-145T (Local Development Program) fared no better: by 2024, 70% of projects were incomplete or nonfunctional, according to the IGF. The 100-Day Emergency Plan, launched in 2023 to tackle inflation and food insecurity, was similarly undermined when 62% of its \$500 million budget was redirected to “security priorities” in politically sensitive regions. Donors increasingly attach funding to governance reforms, but accountability is routinely compromised by strategic interests. The EU’s

Global Gateway Initiative pledged €200 million for infrastructure in 2024 yet waived anti-corruption clauses to secure cobalt for Europe's electric-vehicle industry. The U.S. Development Finance Corporation invested \$1 billion in Congolese cobalt mines in 2023 despite documented rights abuses, prioritizing energy-transition goals over governance.

In the DRC, the line between democratic reformers and anti-democratic veto players is often blurred. Across government, opposition, civil society and the military, powerful factions actively obstruct democratic progress. The current administration's authoritarian and clientelist tendencies, reinforced by military and political elites, have entrenched these groups as the country's primary anti-reform actors.

Figures and movements that initially present themselves as champions of reform are frequently co-opted by the ruling elite, diluting momentum for genuine democratization. In some regions – most notably the Kivus – authority rests less with state institutions than with armed groups or military factions, producing a fragmented political order that undermines national democratization.

Economic interests also weigh heavily against reform. Both domestic and foreign actors, particularly in the mining sector, routinely compromise democratization efforts. These actors, often driven by profit motives, contribute to ongoing armed conflicts, exacerbate corruption, and either engage in, or turn a blind eye to, human rights abuses. Mining has become a focal point of exploitation, where corporate complicity in destabilizing local communities stands in stark contrast to the enormous wealth extracted. These entrenched economic interests continue to block meaningful democratic change.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains mired in ethnic and regional divisions, exacerbated by the resurgence of the M23 rebel group in the east. Despite President Félix Tshisekedi's rhetoric on unity and diversity, the absence of structural reforms has allowed these divisions to deepen. The M23 crisis, reignited in 2021 and escalating through 2023 – 2025, displaced more than 1.7 million people (UNHCR, 2024) and enabled the group to seize strategic territory in North and South Kivu, exploiting long-standing grievances over ethnicity and resource control.

Ethnic identity has long been a tool of political manipulation in the DRC. Politicians frequently invoke “the protection of community interests” to consolidate power, mobilize constituencies and expand influence. Ethnicity has become a bargaining chip in the political arena, frequently exploited to mobilize constituencies and fortify influence. Political elites often manipulate these tensions, exacerbating ethnic conflicts for personal gain. The M23 insurgency, rooted in the perceived marginalization of the Tutsi community, has been used by political elites to rally support, while accusations of Rwandan backing – confirmed by multiple U.N. reports but denied by Kigali – further complicate the crisis. Beyond the Kivus, elites in Kasai, Equateur and Mai-Ndombe have also stoked ethnic tensions, often in alliance with local actors, fragmenting the country for political leverage.

Anti-democratic actors

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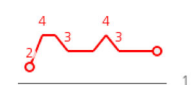
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Cleavage / conflict management

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Conflict-resolution efforts, from peace talks to political dialogues, typically redistribute government posts without addressing root causes. These arrangements prioritize bargaining and short-term stability over durable solutions grounded in constitutional reform. While they may temporarily ease tensions, they rarely resolve the deeper fractures driving instability.

Civil society could, in theory, bridge divides, yet many organizations mirror the same ethnic and political rifts that define the broader society. Some pursue narrow, exclusionary agendas, reinforcing polarization. Others – particularly grassroots women’s groups – work to promote dialogue and reconciliation, often at great personal risk. Activists face harassment, imprisonment and violence, particularly in conflict zones such as eastern Congo, where the DRC military is battling armed groups, including the M23 rebels. With M23 controlling key areas such as the city of Goma, the situation remains highly complex.

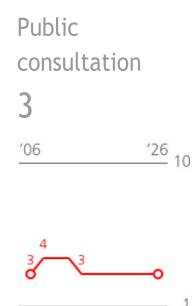
In the end, ethnic and regional fractures remain a political resource for elites, who manipulate them to advance personal and factional interests. Without substantial reforms to address these systemic divisions, the DRC will remain vulnerable to recurring cycles of ethnic violence and regional instability as political actors exploit societal fractures for personal and factional gain.

Public participation in the DRC remains largely symbolic, with civil society voices sidelined in political decision-making. Despite constitutional guarantees of civic engagement, exclusion is systemic. Once elected, representatives who relocate to Kinshasa rarely consult their constituencies, prioritizing elite bargains over grassroots input. Dissent that challenges the state is met with harsh repression: activists from movements such as Filimbi and LUCHA face arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and judicial harassment. In 2023, LUCHA leader Jean-Bosco Muvunyi was detained for protesting electoral irregularities, while Filimbi spokesperson Parfait Muhani fled into exile after threats tied to his criticism of President Tshisekedi’s Union Sacrée coalition.

Civil society’s role is often reduced to performative inclusion during high-profile forums. Tshisekedi’s “national concertation” in 2023, which gathered more than 500 civil society representatives, excluded critical issues such as electoral reform and violence in eastern DRC.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), established in 2013, formally reserves seats for civil society. Yet critics argue the institution remains dominated by presidential allies. Reforms in 2024 expanded civil society representation but did not address allegations of bias ahead of the 2028 elections.

Even large-scale consultations have limited impact. The 2024 – 2028 DRC Development Framework, backed by the World Bank, included input from more than 1,000 organizations, yet the final plan prioritized expanding extractive industries over social equity, sidelining the very concerns civil society raised.



Co-optation further undermines credibility. During the 2023/24 political cycle, more than 20 prominent activists – including former LUCHA coordinator Guillaume Longo – accepted positions in Tshisekedi’s coalition, abandoning their advocacy roles. Organizations such as the Congolese Human Rights Observatory (OCDH) have faced internal scandals, with leaders accused of embezzling donor funds.

Grassroots movements, particularly women’s and youth-led initiatives, struggle to resist these pressures. The Women’s Coalition for Peace and Democracy (CFPD), which mediated conflicts in Ituri, saw three members assassinated in 2024 after rejecting overtures from the ruling party.

Foreign donors and multilateral institutions often inadvertently reinforce these dynamics. The World Bank’s 2024 Governance Program earmarked \$300 million for “participatory governance,” yet 70% of funds were funneled through state institutions, bypassing independent organizations. Western donors denounce repression in principle but remain muted on abuses linked to foreign mining partners, such as Huawei’s cobalt operations in Kolwezi.

In conclusion, while civil society’s involvement in political decision-making is often presented as inclusive, its impact remains limited. Limited consultation, repression of dissent and self-serving behavior among some civil society leaders all combine to block the emergence of a genuinely participatory political process.

Reconciliation and justice remain pivotal for the DRC’s long-term peace, especially in the ethnically divided eastern regions. However, political leadership has made limited progress in these areas. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established by the 2002 peace agreement, remains largely inactive, and ethnic tensions are often manipulated for political gain rather than meaningfully addressed.

The resurgence of the M23 insurgency has deepened divisions, particularly for Tutsi and Rwandophone communities. Despite escalating conflict, little has been done to address their underlying grievances. In 2020, 121 civil society organizations publicly criticized President Tshisekedi for failing to confront impunity and for neglecting national reconciliation. The government has also been faulted for avoiding serious engagement with M23, allowing the group to hold strategic territory, including the eastern hub of Goma, complicating peacebuilding efforts.

Justice is applied selectively: some warlords face international prosecution, while others – especially those with powerful military ties – escape accountability. This double standard entrenches impunity and exacerbates divisions in the east, where armed groups continue to operate unchecked.

Recent elections, combined with the absence of a comprehensive and inclusive peace process, underscore how political fragmentation and selective justice obstruct reconciliation. Without genuine reform and a framework that addresses all communities’ grievances, the DRC risks renewed violence and instability, especially for marginalized groups.

Reconciliation

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Ultimately, without credible commitments to justice, accountability and reconciliation, the country will remain trapped in a cycle of violence, deepening ethnic and regional rifts and a culture of impunity that undermines prospects for lasting peace.

17 | International Cooperation

The current administration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has sought to strengthen cooperation with international partners, whose support remains essential for development. Yet implementation of a consistent long-term strategy has faltered, with aid frequently diverted by political and military elites for personal gain.

To expedite the release of funds, the government often accepts donor conditions that prioritize short-term fixes over structural reform. Flagship initiatives such as President Tshisekedi's Programme de 100 Jours and the PDL-145T have been publicly championed but remain largely unfulfilled.

Corruption continues to erode progress. A 2023 audit found \$400 million earmarked for free primary education siphoned off through inflated contracts and fictitious employees. During the 2022/2023 Ebola outbreak, the World Health Organization reported \$2.3 million in unaccounted funds, echoing earlier scandals such as the 2020 Equateur Province over-invoicing scheme.

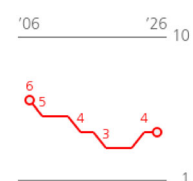
While some advances have been made in aid management, the government has yet to show a clear grasp of the country's structural challenges or to outline a credible long-term development plan. Even mild external criticism is often dismissed as a threat to sovereignty, leaving the DRC's engagement with international partners in an ambiguous and uneasy state.

President Félix Tshisekedi, first elected in contested elections in 2019 and reaffirmed in December 2023, has sought to distinguish his leadership from Joseph Kabila's by reinvigorating international relations and presenting the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as a credible global actor. His government has prioritized restoring ties with institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, securing a \$1.5 billion IMF Extended Credit Facility in 2023 to stabilize the economy and fund development projects. However, international donors remain skeptical, citing persistent governance issues and the government's reluctance to implement meaningful reforms.

Despite Tshisekedi's rhetoric on transparency, decision-making remains highly centralized in the presidency, military elites and provincial authorities. A 2023 U.N. Group of Experts report noted that this structure involving parallel forms of concentrated power undermines effective governance, particularly in the conflict-prone eastern regions.

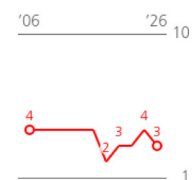
Effective use of support

4



Credibility

3



As the world's largest cobalt supplier, producing 70% of global output, the DRC faces mounting pressure to comply with standards such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). In 2023, the government renegotiated contracts with Chinese firms, including a \$7 billion “infrastructure-for-minerals” deal with Sinohydro, to increase state revenue. But watchdogs such as Global Witness warn of persistent opacity and elite capture, limiting benefits for local communities.

International partners, particularly the European Union and the United States, have become increasingly vocal. In 2023, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned two Congolese officials for embezzlement, while the European Union's 2024 – 2027 cooperation strategy conditions future aid on measurable anti-corruption progress. Donors argue that the Congolese leadership is prioritizing short-term financial gains over long-term reforms, pointing to delays in implementing the national anti-corruption strategy pledged in 2021.

Tshisekedi's administration has made symbolic advances, from joining the East African Community in 2022 to launching a \$1 billion climate resilience fund with the African Development Bank. Yet without concrete improvements in governance, the DRC risks losing critical financing, including access to COP28 climate funds and €200 million earmarked for infrastructure under the European Union's Global Gateway Initiative.

Under President Félix Tshisekedi, in power since 2019, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has sought to redefine its role in African geopolitics through assertive regional diplomacy. By joining the East African Community in 2022 and securing leadership positions in the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Kinshasa aims to overcome its historical isolation and establish itself as a linchpin of continental multilateralism. This outreach also includes strengthening ties with regional bodies such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Central African Economic Community.

Despite these diplomatic efforts, relations with Rwanda remain the sharpest fault line. Long-standing tensions – rooted in mutual accusations of backing insurgent groups – reignited in 2022, when the DRC accused Kigali of supporting the M23 rebellion. U.N. reports, along with U.S. and EU statements between 2023 and 2025, have substantiated these claims. M23's capture of key areas in North and South Kivu, including the border town of Bunagana, displaced more than 1 million people. Rwanda denies involvement, countering that Kinshasa harbors the FDLR militia, a force linked to the 1994 genocide and fails to secure the frontier.

A fleeting period of détente, marked by joint military operations and intelligence-sharing, collapsed as M23's offensive intensified. By late 2023, mediation efforts led by Angola and Kenya under AU and EAC frameworks had stalled. Kinshasa refused direct talks with M23 and demanded Rwanda's withdrawal, while SADC approved a military mission to bolster Congolese forces.

Regional cooperation

5



The DRC's dual membership in SADC and the EAC has exposed underlying geopolitical fractures. While SADC members like South Africa and Angola advocate for a tough stance on Rwanda, EAC states such as Kenya and Uganda favor dialogue, highlighting competing economic and security interests. These splits complicate efforts to curb illicit cross-border trafficking in minerals and arms, which continues to fuel armed groups and undercut formal trade initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area. Global demand for cobalt and copper, essential to the green energy transition, further raises the stakes. In 2023, Kinshasa renegotiated mining contracts with Chinese firms to assert greater control, while Western governments and AU partners pressed for transparency to prevent conflict financing. Yet illicit trade thrives, with U.N. experts accusing Rwanda of laundering Congolese minerals – allegations Kigali rejects.

Tshisekedi's re-election in December 2023 coincided with a harder stance toward Rwanda. Kinshasa expelled Rwanda's ambassador in October 2022 and has since lobbied for sanctions. The AU has floated the idea of a "neutral force" to stabilize the region, but consensus remains elusive. By January 2025, the fall of Goma and Bukavu to M23 raised fears of a wider regional war involving Burundi, Uganda, South Africa and Tanzania.

Even as conflict escalates, the DRC continues to leverage its positions in the AU and SADC to assert sovereignty and press for multilateral solutions. The strategy underscores Tshisekedi's ambition to navigate regional instability while amplifying the DRC's global economic relevance.

Strategic Outlook

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), sub-Saharan Africa's largest country, remains a paradox of immense mineral wealth alongside entrenched poverty and instability. Sustained economic growth, supported by policy reforms and favorable global commodity prices, has yet to translate into broad-based prosperity. More than 70% of Congolese still live below the international poverty line of \$2.15 a day, while political volatility, persistent violence in the eastern provinces and the lingering impacts of the Russia–Ukraine conflict and COVID-19 continue to weigh heavily on the country.

Under President Félix Tshisekedi, the government has prioritized economic reform and infrastructure development. Efforts to combat corruption, attract foreign investment and diversify the economy beyond mining have been coupled with major projects in energy, telecommunications and transport. In 2024, the DRC secured a \$1.5 billion IMF Extended Credit Facility to stabilize fiscal policy and support governance reforms. Initiatives such as the Lobito Corridor transit project – a U.S.- and EU-backed plan to streamline mineral exports – hold long-term promise, though their success hinges on improved security and stronger institutions.

Despite these advances, poverty remains pervasive. High unemployment and inflation continue to limit living standards, while corruption, weak institutions and inefficient governance blunt the impact of reforms. Tshisekedi's administration has also struggled to unify the political landscape, where entrenched patronage networks remain firmly in place. The resurgence of the M23 rebellion underscores these fragilities. The group's seizure of Goma and Bukavu has triggered mass displacement, deepened humanitarian crises and heightened violence. Backed by Rwanda, M23 presents Tshisekedi with one of his most severe tests: restoring stability in the east. Without either a regional diplomatic breakthrough or a decisive military response, the conflict risks further escalation.

The DRC thus stands at a crossroads: a country of immense potential held back by chronic governance failures and insecurity. To move toward sustainable peace and prosperity, priorities include strengthening governance, curbing corruption, resolving the security crisis in the east, diversifying the economy and advancing regional diplomacy. Given the scale and complexity of these challenges, sustained international engagement and support for the path toward sustainable peace and prosperity will be essential.