Development pathways for the DRC to 2050

Governance

Kouassi Yeboua

Last updated 15 May 2023
Governance

Governance in the DR Congo is characterised by networks of rent-seeking political, military and economic elites that direct and organise the abundant natural resources of the country to serve their ethnic and regional allegiances rather than for sustainable development.\[1\] Key positions in the administration are typically allocated based on a system of political patronage (prebendalism) rather than on merit.\[2\]

Despite its vast size, the DR Congo has been a highly centralised state until, in terms of the 2006 Constitution, the former 11 provinces were divided into 26 new territorial units. The subsequent implementation of decentralisation has been fraught, however. As stated by Zongwe:

The rolling out of the decentralisation policy and its timing have been significantly driven by political calculations more than resource constraints, most recently by an attempt by the ruling government to divide provinces into smaller ones in order to prolong its rule. Even after the effective partition of the 11 former provinces [into 26], the process still suffers further complications, like delays and logistic problems in electing new governors, which in turn led to litigation before the Constitutional Court in September 2018. These difficulties take place in a broader context of even greater challenges. The latter include insufficient capacity of provincial administrators, fiscal decentralisation, the questionable economic viability of most provinces, and repeated internal wrangling that has already culminated in the removal or resignation of governors in several provinces.\[3\]

By starving the provinces of money, Kinshasa effectively manages the country from the centre. Between 2007 and 2013, for example, the central government only transferred 6%-7% of taxes to the provinces instead of the 40% prescribed in the Constitution.\[4\]

A report by Transparency International\[5\] points out that, ‘clientelism, rent-seeking and patronage have decimated fair competition, particularly in the sectors of public procurement and extractive industries in DR Congo.’ The report notes that, ‘the ruling elite has a direct stake in the country’s economy, and often steer economic activities in accordance [with] their own personal opportunities.’ Often these same state officials present themselves as private entrepreneurs or resort to their parents (or other family members) to obtain state contracts.\[6\]

Corruption is endemic in the DR Congo and permeates all sectors. It ranges from basic bureaucratic and administrative corruption to grand forms of corruption involving high-ranking members of the government and defence and security forces. The extractive (oil and mining) sector, tax and customs administrations, and the state-run enterprises are among the most affected. Significant amounts of mining revenues and taxes that are collected are not channelled to the treasury and end up in the pockets of individuals and public officials. Gécamines, the largest state-run company in the mining sector, is often cited as the main facilitator in the diversion of the mining revenue from the government budget.\[7\]

Poor government effectiveness and the absence of strong institutional and legal mechanisms to ensure accountability hamper economic progress and further deepen corruption. In 2019, the DR Congo ranked 168th of 180 countries on the Transparency International corruption perceptions index. This high level of corruption significantly affects domestic revenue mobilisation, and hence compromises the badly needed investment in basic socio-economic infrastructure in the country.
Following pressure from the international community, a legal framework to combat corruption was established under Joseph Kabila’s regime but remains ineffective. It often serves more as a political weapon than an actual indication of political will to tackle corruption. As pointed out by Matti,[8] ‘the rent-seeking elites in DR Congo generally lack the incentives and political will to build strong institutions to curb corruption.’

However, the new president has made a strong commitment to deviate from the inefficiency, corruption and political patronage that have characterised governance since Mobutu’s era. Thus, a new commission to combat corruption has been created — *l’Agence de prévention et de lutte contre la corruption* (APLC) — and some high-level arrests have been made, such as the president’s chief of staff, Vital Kamerhe, who was found guilty of embezzlement. However, Vital Kamerhe’s supporters and some observers perceive his arrest as politically motivated given his presidential ambitions for 2023 rather than a step towards the establishment of the rule of law in the country.
The institutional characteristics echo this telling feature of the institutional environment. The Polity V composite index from the Centre for Systemic Peace (CSP) categorises countries according to their regime characteristics. According to this index, the DR Congo has transitioned from an authoritarian governance model to an anocracy (reflecting its current unstable hybrid regime type). It is neither authoritarian nor fully democratic; it goes through the motions of elections, for example, but they are not substantively free and fair with all the attendant challenges associated with such hybrid systems.

In its most recent data update for 2018, the CSP allocated the DR Congo a score of -3 on its scale of -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). This is compared to the average for low-income countries of 1.36, indicating that the country has significantly more authoritarian governance characteristics than its peers.

The V-Dem dataset, which compares different types of democracy, scores the DR Congo as 0.327 out of 1 on its electoral democracy index but only 0.139 on its liberal democracy index. This reflects the extent to which the nominal practices of democracy are not accompanied by substantive democracy. To compound these challenges, the gap between the two types of democracy has increased, reflecting the extent to which the DR Congo’s institutions and elections lack legitimacy and that many of its core structures are not independent.
Endnotes


Donors and sponsors

Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the Creative Commons BY license. You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.

- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.

- All of our charts can be embedded in any site.

Cite this research

About the authors

Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.