



Development pathways for the DRC to 2050

Governance

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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.

Chart 1: Governance indicators

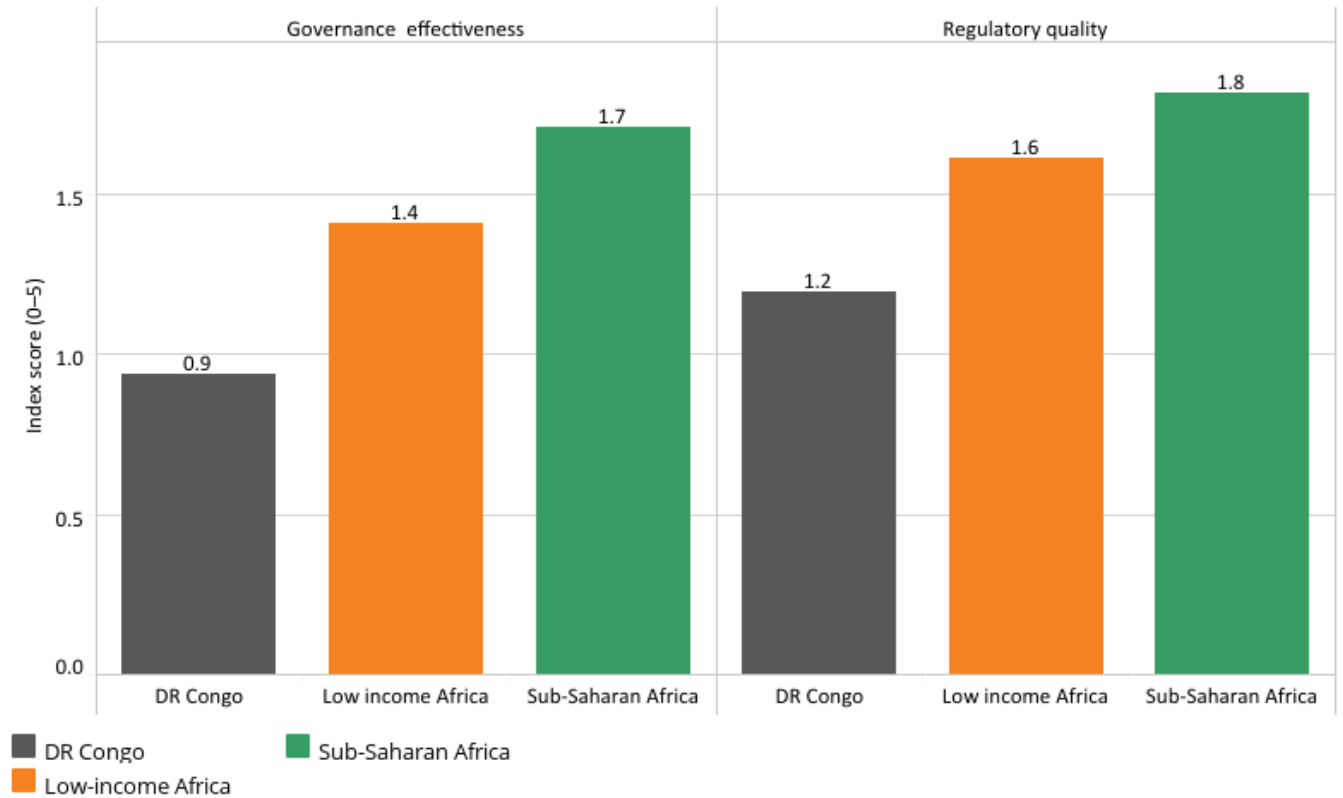
Government effectiveness and **regulatory quality** indexes are sourced from the World Bank's Governance Indicators (WGI). Government effectiveness 'captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.' Regulatory quality measures 'perceptions of the government's ability to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote the private sector development.'

The **corruption perceptions index** is from Transparency International, which ranks countries based on perceptions of public sector corruption.

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.

Chart 2: Governance performance for DRC and other groups, 2019



Source: IFs version 7.54; historical data from World Bank

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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.[9]

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

1. K Kaiser and S Wolters, Fragile states, elites, and rents in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in D North et al, (eds.), In the Shadow of Violence: Politics, Economics, and the Problems of Development, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
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3. DP Zongwe, Decentralization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Autonomy Arrangements in the World, March 2019, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.20028.08321.
4. DP Zongwe, Decentralization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Autonomy Arrangements in the World, March 2019, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.20028.08321.
5. Transparency International, [Overview of corruption and anti-corruption in the DRC](#), 2010,
6. See for example: B Akitoby and M Cinyabuguma, Sources of Growth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Cointegration Approach, IMF Working Paper WP/04/114, July 2004; International Monetary Fund, [Democratic Republic of the Congo: Staff-monitored program and request for disbursement under the rapid credit facility](#), Press Release, Staff Report and Statement by the Executive Director for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 December 2019,
7. Global Witness, [Regime cash machine](#): How the Democratic Republic of Congo's booming mining exports are failing to benefit its people, 21 July 2017
8. SA Matti, The Democratic Republic of Congo: Corruption, Patronage and Competitive Authoritarianism in the DRC, Africa Today, 56:4, Summer 2010, 42–61.
9. [Center for Systemic Peace](#), Polity5 Annual Time Series 1946–2018

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Cite this research

Kouassi Yeboua (2024) Development pathways for the DRC to 2050. Published online at futures.issafrica.org. Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/special-reports/country/drc/> [Online Resource] Updated 15 May 2023.

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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.

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