

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Congo (Brazzaville)

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-4</td> <td>-4</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>13</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	-4	-4	0	Democ:	0	0	0	Autoc:	4	4	0	Durable:		13		Tentative:		No		
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SCODE	CON	CCODE	484	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	0	0	2	3	2																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	14 October 1997		Begin Date	15 October 1997																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1992																								
Executive(s)	President Denis Sassou-Nguesso (PCT); initially designated leader from 1979 to 1992; seized power 14 October 1997; directly elected 10 March 2002, 89.4%; reelected 12 July 2009, 78.6%																								
Legislature	Bicameral: National Assembly (137 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 24 June and 5 August 2007) Congolese Labour Party (PCT): 44 Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development (MCDDI): 11 Pan-African Union for Social-Democracy (UPADS): 11 Non-partisans: 36 Other parties: 35 Senate (66 seats; elected by district, local and regional councils)																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Gradual Transition from Self-Selection (5)

Since achieving independence from France in 1960, nearly one dozen coups and military uprisings have taken place in the Republic of Congo. The current leader of the Congo (Brazzaville), Denis Sassou-Nguesso, has long played a central role in the political machinations of this poor, unstable West African country. Originally ascending to power in 1979 by designation of the ruling Congolese Labor Party (PCT),

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

President Sassou-Nguesso governed this one-party state in an autocratic manner until the early 1990s. A referendum held in the spring of 1992 approved a new constitution which laid the groundwork for the establishment of multiparty electoral politics in the Congo. In August of that year Sassou-Nguesso was defeated in first round presidential balloting by Pascal Lissouba (UPADS) and Bernard Kolelas (MCDDI). In second round balloting Lissouba was declared the winner over Kolelas. Despite the successful conduct of presidential elections in the Congo, democracy had an uncertain footing in this country.

As the presidential elections of 1997 approached, political tensions between Lissouba and Sassou-Nguesso were running high. Violence broke out between Sassou-Nguesso's private militia (the "Cobras") and President Lissouba's private militias (the "Zoulous" and "Aubevillois") after President Lissouba attempted to arrest Sassou-Nguesso. The armed forces of the Congo, split between supporters of Lissouba and Sassou-Nguesso, joined the private militias in all-out civil war in Brazzaville and its surrounding environs. Bernard Kolelas ordered his "Ninja" private militia into battle in support of Lissouba but his forces made little impact on the course of the war once Angolan troops entered the country in early October to fight on Sassou-Nguesso's behalf. On 14 October 1997 Sassou-Nguesso's Cobras captured the presidential palace and President Lissouba was forced to flee the country. Sassou-Nguesso suspended the constitution and assumed the office of president.

Between 1997 and 1999 over 20,000 citizens were killed and over 800,000 uprooted in violence between the government of President Sassou-Nguesso and opposition forces loyal to former President Lissouba and former Prime Minister Kolelas. Both Lissouba and Kolelas fled the country and were convicted in absentia of treason. In a peace accord brokered in late 1999 between Sassou-Nguesso and supporters of the exiled Lissouba, the outline of a program for return to peaceful electoral politics was forged. In September 2001 the Transitional Parliament adopted a draft constitution that provided for the holding of democratic elections. The new constitution was approved by popular referendum on 22 January 2002.

President Sassou-Nguesso won the March 2002 presidential elections after his main rivals either boycotted or were barred from the contest. While international monitors deemed the election to be generally free from corruption, the new constitution effectively ensured a victory for Sassou-Nguesso. Both Pascal Lissouba and Bernard Kolelas were prohibited from entering the race by the revised constitution which required candidates to have resided continuously in the country for at least two years prior to the election. In the aftermath of these elections fierce conflict between the government and Kolelas's "Ninjas" erupted in the Pool region and in the capital city.

President Sassou-Nguesso easily won the presidential election held on 12 July 2009 with nearly 80% of the vote against a weak slate of candidates. A number of leading opposition figures had called for a boycott of the election and they contested the validity of the turnout figure, claiming that the vast majority of the population stayed away from the polls. The government has repeatedly resisted efforts to establish an independent electoral committee. Prior to the 2009 polls, the government-sponsored electoral committee disqualified four candidates, most notably the candidate from the Pan-African Union for Social Democracy, the largest opposition party in the National Assembly. No independent observers were able to monitor the vote. In October 2009 it was reported that a group of exiled leaders established a "parallel government" in Paris.

Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)

President Sassou-Nguesso wields political power in the Congo without any meaningful legislative or judicial constraints. In the aftermath of the 1997 war, President Sassou-Nguesso replaced the 1992 democratic constitution with the Fundamental Act, which provided the President with virtually unlimited powers. A new constitution that significantly increased the institutional powers of the President was approved, according to government figures, by over 80% of the electorate in January 2002. The new constitution abolishes the post of prime minister, establishes a bicameral legislature and removes the powers of the legislative branch to remove the president from office. Ten opposition parties called on their supporters to boycott the nationwide plebiscite, arguing that the new constitution would weaken democracy in their country. While the degree of horizontal accountability in this new system is very weak, the reinstatement of an elected legislative body in May-June 2002 was a slight improvement in political liberalization. In these elections the president's Congolese Labor Party (PCT) won an overall majority in both houses of parliament. Parliamentary elections in 2007 were marred by opposition boycotts, low turnout, and problems with voter rolls and ballots. Although international observers posited that the election was generally free from corruption or intimidation, the PCT and its allies won a vast majority of

seats. Only eleven of 137 seats were won by opposition parties. These results suggest the possible formation of a one-party dominant system in the Congo. The judiciary is subject to significant influence by the executive branch.

Political Participation: Authoritarian-Guided Liberalization (3)

Ethnic divisions have long defined politics in the Congo (Brazzaville). The core division in the Congo is regional in nature between the ethnic tribes of the densely populated south and the smaller tribes of the sparsely populated north. However, tribal divisions *within* each region have also been politicized by the political elite within this country and have contributed to the social instability of the Congo. Prior to the establishment of democratic politics in 1992, PCT politicians prided themselves on facilitating the creation of a unified national identity in the Congo (even though loyal Mbochi and Kouyou followers were often disproportionately favored in the distribution of state resources). While their nation-building rhetoric did not extinguish tribal and regional identities, ethnic politics did decline from the late 1960s through the 1980s.

Openly ethnopolitical politics quickly resurfaced in the Congo with the establishment of multiparty politics in the early 1990s and the discovery of offshore oil wealth in the country. Each of the three leading politicians in the Congo during the past decade has relied on their ethnoregional base to pursue their narrow political and economic objectives. Each politician controls their own ethnic-based private militia and their respective party organizations are ethnically exclusive in orientation. Former President Lissouba's regional base is found in the southern areas of Niari, Lekoumou and Bouenza, where his support comes primarily from Nibolek and Bembe followers. While Lissouba originally sought to establish a transethnic coalition in his administration, most Congolese citizens viewed this effort with suspicion. Kolelas's political base, like Lissouba's, is also found in the southern half of the country. However, Kolelas's political support largely comes from the Lari people and the tribes of the central Pool region. In contrast to both Lissouba and Kolelas, Sassou-Nguesso derives his core support from the Mbochi people of northern Congo. These ethnoregional divisions within the country as a whole can be further represented in the distinct ethnic enclaves found in Brazzaville, whose boundaries have served as the frontlines for much of the political violence of the past decade. Serious civil unrest erupted in the Congo in 1993-94, 1997 and 1998-99.

Sassou-Nguesso's unconstitutional seizure of power, and his subsequent reluctance to return the country to democratic rule, has largely been attributed to his narrow political base in the north of the country. With few individuals voting outside their own ethnic group in the 1992 elections, Sassou-Nguesso, who received only 17% of the popular vote, saw the prospects of victory in 1997 as remote. In the aftermath of the 1997 war, Sassou-Nguesso, not surprisingly, has been reluctant to reestablish a political system in which he is at such a disadvantage. This reluctance to revive democracy triggered the renewal of ethnic conflict in August 1998. This conflict, which resulted in over one-third of the total population being internally displaced, ended in late 1999 after President Sassou-Nguesso reestablished military and political control through a combination of coercion and co-optation. However, this is a tenuous peace at best. The crucial issue of how to effectively share power between the Congo's numerous ethnic tribes has yet to be resolved. While there are very strong underlying currents of factionalism, President Sassou-Nguesso's decision to limit the political freedoms of virtually all opposition forces made his regime highly restricted in nature.

While opposition parties and organizations are allowed to operate in the Congo, their ability to mobilize followers and compete in the political arena remains tightly regulated. The government continues to restrict the political activities of its main rival – Lissouba's UPADS- and prior to the 2007 parliamentary elections it co-opted Lissouba's MCDII through a strategic alliance. Moreover, as the violent conflict between the government and Ninja rebels (some loyal to former Prime Minister Kolelas and others to the renegade priest, Pastor Ntoumi) in Brazzaville and the Pool Region during 2002 and 2003 vividly demonstrated, coercion continues to be a staple of political life in this country. In January 2004 rebel leader Frederic Bitsangou, alias Pastor Ntoumi, claimed that he would only disarm the militia allied to him when the government opened up space within the nation's political system for opposition political voices. He has demanded the formation of a government of national unity in which his political party, the Council of National Resistance, would take part. To date the government has not acquiesced, and the 2007 parliamentary elections suggest rather a tightening of PTC control over political participation.

In late December 2010 both houses of the National Assembly passed a government-sponsored bill that will provide legal protection for the country's indigenous peoples. The new law, the first indigenous

rights bill in Africa, seeks to counter the economic and social marginalization of the country's indigenous groups. Constituting 10% of the population, these groups have suffered from the historic discrimination of the country's Bantu majority.