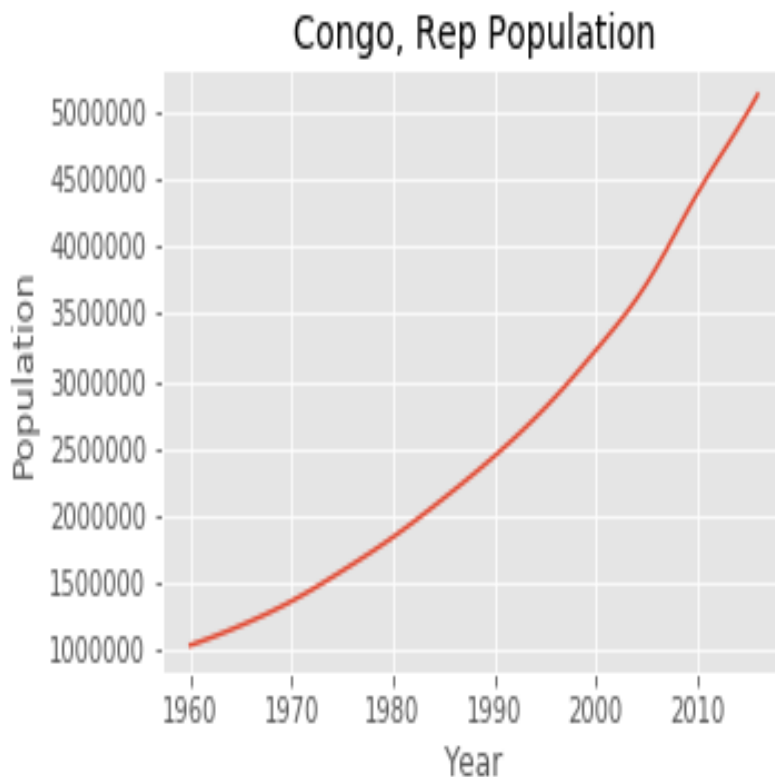


Congo, Rep



The Republic of the Congo (French: République du Congo), also known as the Congo-Brazzaville, the Congo Republic, West Congo, the former French Congo, or simply the Congo, is a country in Central Africa. It is bordered by five countries: Gabon and the Atlantic Ocean to the west; Cameroon to the northwest; the Central African Republic to the northeast; the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the east and south; and the Angolan exclave of Cabinda to the southwest. The region was dominated by Bantu-speaking tribes, who built trade links leading into the Congo River basin. Congo-Brazzaville was formerly part of the French colony of Equatorial Africa. Upon independence in 1960, the former colony of French Congo became the Republic of the Congo. The People's Republic of the Congo was a Marxist–Leninist one-party state from 1970 to 1991. Multi-party elections have been held since 1992, although a democratically elected government was ousted in the 1997 Republic of the Congo Civil War and President Denis Sassou Nguesso, who first came to power in 1979, has ruled for 33 of the past 38 years. The political stability and development of hydrocarbon production made the Republic of the Congo the fourth largest oil producer in the Gulf of Guinea, providing the country with a degree of prosperity despite instability in some areas and unequal distribution of oil revenue nationwide. Congo's economy is heavily dependent on the oil sector and economic growth has slowed considerably since the post-2015 drop in oil prices. == History == === Pre-colonial === Bantu-speaking peoples who founded tribes during the Bantu expansions largely displaced and absorbed the earliest inhabitants of the region, the Pygmy people, about 1500 BC. The Bakongo, a Bantu ethnic group that also occupied parts of present-day Angola, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formed the basis for ethnic affinities and rivalries among those countries. Several Bantu kingdoms—notably those of the Kongo, the Loango, and the Teke—built trade links leading into the Congo River basin. The Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão reached the mouth of the Congo in 1484. Commercial relationships quickly grew between the inland Bantu kingdoms and European merchants who traded various commodities, manufactured goods, and people captured from the hinterlands. After centuries as a major hub for transatlantic trade, direct European colonization of the Congo river delta began in the

late 19th century, subsequently eroding the power of the Bantu societies in the region. === French colonial era === The area north of the Congo River came under French sovereignty in 1880 as a result of Pierre de Brazza's treaty with King Makoko of the Bateke. This Congo Colony became known first as French Congo, then as Middle Congo in 1903. In 1908, France organized French Equatorial Africa (AEF), comprising Middle Congo, Gabon, Chad, and Oubangui-Chari (the modern Central African Republic). The French designated Brazzaville as the federal capital. Economic development during the first 50 years of colonial rule in Congo centered on natural-resource extraction. The methods were often brutal: construction of the Congo–Ocean Railroad following World War I has been estimated to have cost at least 14,000 lives. During the Nazi occupation of France during World War II, Brazzaville functioned as the symbolic capital of Free France between 1940 and 1943. The Brazzaville Conference of 1944 heralded a period of major reform in French colonial policy. Congo benefited from the postwar expansion of colonial administrative and infrastructure spending as a result of its central geographic location within AEF and the federal capital at Brazzaville. It also received a local legislature after the adoption of the 1946 constitution that established the Fourth Republic. Following the revision of the French constitution that established the Fifth Republic in 1958, the AEF dissolved into its constituent parts, each of which became an autonomous colony within the French Community. During these reforms, Middle Congo became known as the Republic of the Congo in 1958 and published its first constitution in 1959. Antagonism between the pro-Opangault Mbochis and the pro-Youlou Balalis resulted in a series of riots in Brazzaville in February 1959, which the French Army subdued. === Post-independence era === The Republic of the Congo received full independence from France on 15 August 1960. Fulbert Youlou ruled as the country's first president until labour elements and rival political parties instigated a three-day uprising that ousted him. The Congolese military took charge of the country briefly and installed a civilian provisional government headed by Alphonse Massamba-Débat. Resentment and bitterness between the Baali and the Mbochi peoples brought upheaval in Brazzaville (February 1959). The French army arrived to quell the turmoil. The highly controversial leader, Abbé Fulbert Youlou, the first black mayor to be elected in French Equatorial Africa and "the first president of our country" was overthrown in August 1963 during Les Trois Glorieuses which is a reference to the 1830 revolution of the same name against Charles X of France. New elections took place in April 1959. By the time the Congo became independent (August 1960), Jacques Opangault, the former opponent of Youlou, agreed to serve under him. Youlou became the first President of the Republic of the Congo. Since the political tension was so high in Pointe-Noire, Youlou moved the capital to Brazzaville. Under the 1963 constitution, Massamba-Débat was elected President for a five-year term. During Massamba-Débat's term in office the regime adopted "scientific socialism" as the country's constitutional ideology. In 1965, Congo established relations with the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, North Korea and North Vietnam. Massamba-Débat's regime also invited several hundred Cuban army troops into the country to train his party's militia units and these troops helped his government survive a coup in 1966 led by paratroopers loyal to future President Marien Ngouabi. Nevertheless, Massamba-Débat was unable to reconcile various institutional, tribal and ideological factions within the country and his regime ended abruptly with a bloodless coup d'état in September 1968. Marien Ngouabi, who had participated in the coup, assumed the presidency on 31 December 1968. One year later, President Ngouabi proclaimed Congo Africa's first "people's republic", the People's Republic of the Congo, and announced the decision of the National Revolutionary Movement to change its name to the Congolese Labour Party (PCT). Ngouabi survived an attempted coup in 1972 but was assassinated on 16 March 1977. An 11-member Military Committee of the Party (CMP) was then named to head an interim government with Joachim Yhombi-Opango to serve as President of the Republic. Two years later, Yhombi-Opango was forced from power and Denis Sassou Nguesso become the new president. Sassou Nguesso aligned the country with the Eastern Bloc and signed a twenty-year friendship pact with the Soviet Union. Over the years, Sassou had to rely more on political repression and less on patronage to maintain his dictatorship. Pascal Lissouba, who became Congo's first elected president (1992–1997) during the period of multi-party democracy, attempted to implement economic reforms with IMF backing to liberalize the economy. In June 1996 the IMF approved a three-year SDR69.5m (US\$100m) enhanced structural adjustment facility (ESAF) and was on the verge of announcing a renewed annual agreement when civil war broke out in Congo in mid-1997. Congo's democratic progress was derailed in 1997 when Lissouba and Sassou started to fight for power in the civil war. As presidential elections scheduled for July 1997 approached, tensions between the Lissouba and Sassou camps mounted. On 5 June, President Lissouba's government forces surrounded Sassou's compound in Brazzaville and

Sassou ordered members of his private militia (known as "Cobras") to resist. Thus began a four-month conflict that destroyed or damaged much of Brazzaville and caused tens of thousands of civilian deaths. In early October, the Angolan régime began an invasion of Congo to install Sassou in power. In mid-October, the Lissouba government fell. Soon thereafter, Sassou declared himself president. In the controversial elections in 2002, Sassou won with almost 90% of the vote cast. His two main rivals, Lissouba and Bernard Kolelas, were prevented from competing and the only remaining credible rival, Andre Milongo, advised his supporters to boycott the elections and then withdrew from the race. A new constitution, agreed upon by referendum in January 2002, granted the president new powers, extended his term to seven years, and introduced a new bicameral assembly. International observers took issue with the organization of the presidential election and the constitutional referendum, both of which were reminiscent in their organization of Congo's era of the one-party state. Following the presidential elections, fighting restarted in the Pool region between government forces and rebels led by Pastor Ntumi; a peace treaty to end the conflict was signed in April 2003. Sassou also won the following presidential election in July 2009. According to the Congolese Observatory of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization, the election was marked by "very low" turnout and "fraud and irregularities". In March 2015 Sassou announced that he wanted to run for yet another term in office and a constitutional referendum in October resulted in a changed constitution which allowed him to run during the 2016 presidential election.

== Government and politics == Congo-Brazzaville has had a multi-party political system since the early 1990s, although the system is heavily dominated by President Denis Sassou Nguesso; he has lacked serious competition in the presidential elections held under his rule. Sassou Nguesso is backed by his own Congolese Labour Party (French: Parti Congolais du Travail) as well as a range of smaller parties. Sassou's regime has been hit by corruption revelations despite attempts to censor them. One French investigation found over 110 bank accounts and dozens of lavish properties in France; Sassou denounced embezzlement investigations as "racist" and "colonial". Denis Christel Sassou-Nguesso, son of Denis Sassou Nguesso, has been named in association with the Panama Papers. On 27 March 2015, Sassou Nguesso announced that his government would hold a referendum on changing the country's 2002 constitution to allow him to run for a third consecutive term in office. On October 25 the government held a referendum to allow Sassou Nguesso to run in the next election. The government claimed that the proposal was approved by 92% of voters with 72% of eligible voters participating. The opposition, who boycotted the referendum, said that the government's statistics were false and the vote was a sham. The election raised questions and was accompanied by civil unrest and police shootings of protesters; at least 18 people were killed by security forces during opposition rallies leading up to the referendum held in October.

=== Media === In 2008, the main media were owned by the government, but much more privately run forms of media were being created. There is one government-owned television station and around 10 small private television channels.

=== Human rights === Many Pygmies belong from birth to Bantus in a relationship many refer to as slavery. The Congolese Human Rights Observatory says that the Pygmies are treated as property the same way "pets" are. On 30 December 2010, the Congolese parliament adopted a law for the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. This law is the first of its kind in Africa, and its adoption is an historic development for indigenous peoples on the continent.

=== Administrative divisions === The Republic of the Congo is divided into 12 départements (departments). Departments are divided into communes and districts. These are:

== Geography and climate == Congo is located in the central-western part of sub-Saharan Africa, along the Equator, lying between latitudes 4°N and 5°S, and longitudes 11° and 19°E. To the south and east of it is the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is also bounded by Gabon to the west, Cameroon and the Central African Republic to the north, and Cabinda (Angola) to the southwest. It has a short coast on the Atlantic Ocean. The capital, Brazzaville, is located on the Congo River, in the south of the country, immediately across from Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The southwest of the country is a coastal plain for which the primary drainage is the Kouilou-Niari River; the interior of the country consists of a central plateau between two basins to the south and north. Forests are under increasing exploitation pressure. Since the country is located on the Equator, the climate is consistent year-round, with the average day temperature a humid 24 °C (75 °F) and nights generally between 16 °C (61 °F) and 21 °C (70 °F). The average yearly rainfall ranges from 1,100 millimetres (43 in) in the Niari Valley in the south to over 2,000 millimetres (79 in) in central parts of the country. The dry season is from June to August, while in the majority of the country the wet season has two rainfall maxima: one in March–May and another in September–November. In 2006–07, researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society studied gorillas in heavily forested regions centered

on the Ouesso district of the Sangha Region. They suggest a population on the order of 125,000 western lowland gorillas, whose isolation from humans has been largely preserved by inhospitable swamps. == Economy == The economy is a mixture of village agriculture and handicrafts, an industrial sector based largely on petroleum, support services, and a government characterized by budget problems and overstaffing. Petroleum extraction has supplanted forestry as the mainstay of the economy. In 2008, oil sector accounted for 65% of the GDP, 85% of government revenue, and 92% of exports. The country also has large untapped mineral wealth. In the early 1980s, rapidly rising oil revenues enabled the government to finance large-scale development projects with GDP growth averaging 5% annually, one of the highest rates in Africa. The government has mortgaged a substantial portion of its petroleum earnings, contributing to a shortage of revenues. 12 January 1994 devaluation of Franc Zone currencies by 50% resulted in inflation of 46% in 1994, but inflation has subsided since. Economic reform efforts continued with the support of international organizations, notably the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The reform program came to a halt in June 1997 when civil war erupted. When Sassou Nguesso returned to power at the end of the war in October 1997, he publicly expressed interest in moving forward on economic reforms and privatization and in renewing cooperation with international financial institutions. However, economic progress was badly hurt by slumping oil prices and the resumption of armed conflict in December 1998, which worsened the republic's budget deficit. The current administration presides over an uneasy internal peace and faces difficult economic problems of stimulating recovery and reducing poverty, despite record-high oil prices since 2003. Natural gas and diamonds are also recent major Congolese exports, although Congo was excluded from the Kimberley Process in 2004 amid allegations that most of its diamond exports were in fact being smuggled out of the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo; it was re-admitted to the group in 2007. The Republic of the Congo also has large untapped base metal, gold, iron and phosphate deposits. The country is a member of the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA). The Congolese government signed an agreement in 2009 to lease 200,000 hectares of land to South African farmers to reduce its dependence on imports. The GDP of the Republic of the Congo grew by 6% in 2014 and is expected to have grown by 7.5% in 2015. == Transportation == Transport in the Republic of the Congo includes land, air and water transportation. The country's rail system was built by forced laborers during the 1930s and largely remains in operation. There are also over 1000 km of paved roads and two major international airports (Maya-Maya Airport and Pointe Noire Airport) which have flights to destinations in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. The country also has a large port on the Atlantic Ocean at Pointe-Noire and others along the Congo River at Brazzaville and Impfondo. == Demographics == The Republic of the Congo's sparse population is concentrated in the southwestern portion of the country, leaving the vast areas of tropical jungle in the north virtually uninhabited. Thus, Congo is one of the most urbanized countries in Africa, with 70% of its total population living in a few urban areas, namely in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire or one of the small cities or villages lining the 534-kilometre (332 mi) railway which connects the two cities. In rural areas, industrial and commercial activity has declined rapidly in recent years, leaving rural economies dependent on the government for support and subsistence. Ethnically and linguistically the population of the Republic of the Congo is diverse—Ethnologue recognises 62 spoken languages in the country—but can be grouped into three categories. The Kongo are the largest ethnic group and form roughly half of the population. The most significant subgroups of the Kongo are Laari in Brazzaville and Pool regions and Vili around Pointe-Noire and along the Atlantic coast. The second largest group are the Teke who live to the north of Brazzaville with 17% of the population. Boulangui (M'Boshi) live in the northwest and in Brazzaville and form 12% of the population. Pygmies make up 2% of Congo's population. Before the 1997 war, about 9,000 Europeans and other non-Africans lived in Congo, most of whom were French; only a fraction of this number remains. Around 300 American expatriates reside in the Congo. According to CIA World Factbook, the people of the Republic of the Congo are largely a mix of Catholics (33.1%), Awakening Lutherans (22.3%) and other Protestants (19.9%). Followers of Islam make up 1.6%, and this is primarily due to an influx of foreign workers into the urban centers. According to a 2011–12 survey, total fertility rate was 5.1 children born per woman, with 4.5 in urban areas and 6.5 in rural areas. === Health === Public expenditure health was at 8.9% of the GDP in 2004, whereas private expenditure was at 1.3%. As of 2012, the HIV/AIDS prevalence was at 2.8% among 15- to 49-year-olds. Health expenditure was at US\$30 per capita in 2004. A large proportion of the population is undernourished, with malnutrition being a problem in Congo-Brazzaville. There were 20 physicians per 100,000 persons in the early 2000s (decade). As of 2010, the maternal mortality rate was 560 deaths/100,000 live births, and the

infant mortality rate was 59.34 deaths/1,000 live births. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is rare in the country, being confined to limited geographic areas of the country. == Culture == The Congolese culture has been influenced by a wide variety of natural landscapes, stretching from the savannah plains in the North Niari flooded forests, to the great Congo River, to rugged mountains and forest of Mayombe, and including 170 km of beaches along the Atlantic coast. The presence of numerous ethnic groups and various political structures once (Kongo Empire, Kingdom of Loango kingdom Teke, Northern chiefdoms) provided an enormous amount of diversity in the traditional cultures as well as in many ancient artistic expressions. Vili Nail fetishes, Bembe statuettes which are very expressive despite their small size, the strange masks of the Punu and Kwele, reliquaries Kinabalu, Teke fetishes, curious cemeteries, with their monumental tombs and the Lari country are all such features. The Congolese also have a considerable colonial architectural heritage, which they are rediscovering today as part of their ancestry, and their tourist capital. They are also taking great pains to restore these artefacts, at least in Brazzaville. Tourism remains a very marginal resource in the Congo, reception facilities based out of Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville lack a sufficient and consistent communications network. Many sites are difficult to visit but, paradoxically, some of the South's most populous and developed locations are often the least accessible. For example, the massive Chaillu Mountains are almost impossible to visit. Many Congolese singers have carried the country's image to the furthest reaches of the globe: the Franco-Congolese rapper Passi playing in France to whom we owe the release of several hit albums to like the "Temptations" with the famous song "I zap and I mate", without forgetting the M'Passi singer of the former group Melgroove, rappers Calbo of Arsenik group, Ben J of Neg Marrons, Mystic, RCFA, The group Bisso Na Bisso and Casimir Zao. The Republic of Congo has several writers recognized in Africa and the French-speaking world: Alain Mabanckou, Jean-Baptiste Tati Loutard Jeannette Ballou Tchichelle, Henri Lopes, Lassie Mbouity and Tchicaya U Tam'si. Other artistic genres such as movies often struggle to make breakthroughs. After a promising start in the 1970s, the troubled political situation and the closure of cinemas made production difficult. The country produces no feature film each year and generally the filmmakers directly broadcast their video production. Unfortunately, Congolese culture, art, and media has remained a poor investment due to the various successive governments creating instability. === Education === Public expenditure of the GDP was less in 2002–05 than in 1991. Public education is theoretically free and mandatory for under-16-year-olds but, in practice, expenses exist. Net primary enrollment rate was 44% in 2005, much less than the 79% in 1991. Education between ages six and sixteen is compulsory. Pupils who complete six years of primary school and seven years of secondary school obtain a baccalaureate. The country has universities. At university, students can obtain a bachelor's degree in three years and a master's after four. Marien Ngouabi University—which offers courses in medicine, law, and other fields—is the country's only public university. Instruction at all levels is in French, and the educational system as a whole models the French system. == See also == Outline of the Republic of the Congo Index of Republic of the Congo-related articles French Congo French Equatorial Africa List of Congolese List of writers from the Republic of the Congo Music of the Republic of the Congo Public holidays in the Republic of the Congo == References == == Further reading == Maria Petringa, Brazza, A Life for Africa (2006) ISBN 978-1-4259-1198-0 == External links == Government Presidency of the Republic (in French) Chief of State and Cabinet Members General Country Profile from BBC News "Republic of the Congo". The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency. Republic of the Congo from UCB Libraries GovPubs Republic of the Congo at Curlie (based on DMOZ) Wikimedia Atlas of the Republic of the Congo Review of Congo by the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, 6 May 2009. Humanitarian news and analysis from IRIN – Congo Tourism Republic of the Congo travel guide from Wikivoyage