

## Republic of Congo Country Profile

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The Republic of Congo, also known as Congo-Brazzaville, became independent from France in 1960. The country is ethnically diverse, with 48% Kongolese, 20% Sangha, 17% Teke, 12% M'Bochi, and 3% European and immigrants.

Historically the Kongo established several kingdoms along the Congo River and ruled much of present day Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and northern Angola. Portuguese traders arrived on the Congo River in the 1500's. King Nzinga converted to Christianity and his son, Afonso I, mandated construction of many churches. A diplomatic relationship with the Vatican was even formed.

The colonization of Brazil and the ensuing Portuguese slave trade led to deterioration of the relationship with King Afonso I, who complained that the slave trade was depopulating his kingdom and fomenting war. Even royal family members were enslaved and deported to Brazil. Revolts against Portuguese rule were defeated by Portuguese force. The kingdom of the Kongo disintegrated.

During the scramble for Africa of the late 19th century, Congo's strategic position in the heart of Africa, its plethora of natural resources and the presence of the Congo river made it a prime target for European colonization. France, Belgium and Portugal fought for control of the river. The mouth of the river was divided between Portugal and France, with a portion to Belgium. The Belgian King Leopold made the Congo Free State his personal property and extended his rule over all of what is currently the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He murderously exploited its rubber, ivory, gold, and diamonds until forced to give up his personal rule to the Belgian state after one of the world's first human rights campaigns.

France conquered the area north of the Congo River and signed a treaty with King Makoko, establishing the French Congo, which became part of French Equatorial Africa. During Nazi occupation of France during World War II, Brazzaville became the symbolic capital of Free France between 1940 and 1943.

The Republic of Congo was granted full independence from France on August 15, 1960, with Fulbert Youlou elected the first president. Soon the military took control of the country. They adopted Marxism-Leninism and established relations with the Soviet Union. Denis Sassou Nguesso became President. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Congo held multi-party elections and in 1992 Pascal Lissouba became President.

**Civil War:** In 1997 ethnic and political tensions exploded into a full-scale civil war, fuelled in part by the prize of the country's offshore oil wealth. The army split along ethnic lines, with most northern officers joining President Denis Sassou Nguesso's side, and most southerners backing Lissouba. Sassou Nguesso's troops were backed by Angola. By the end of 1999, Lissouba was defeated and agreed to a ceasefire. Remnants of Lissouba's militias, known as Ninjas, are still armed and have turned to banditry.

**Oil and diamonds:** The Republic of Congo is one of sub-Saharan Africa's main oil producers, though seventy percent of the population lives in abject poverty. Oil is the mainstay of the economy. In 2004 the country was expelled from the Kimberley Process that is supposed to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the world supply market, because the Republic of Congo could not account for the origin of large quantities of rough diamonds that it was officially exporting. IMF debt relief to the country was delayed in 2006 following allegations of corruption.

In 2009 another election took place, with Sassou winning by a large margin. Many election observers noted widespread fraud. Six opposition candidates boycotted the election. Ethnic divisions remain strong.

## Genocide Watch Stage 6