



Congo-Brazzaville — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as the Republic of the Congo]

08/01/1886 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: On 08/01/1886 the republic of the Congo became the Colony of Gabon and Congo. On 04/30/1891 it became the colony of French Congo (Middle Congo and Gabon). On 01/15/1910 Middle Congo, Gabon, and Oubangui-Chari-Tchad (from 1916 Oubangui-Chari and Chad) form French Equatorial Africa (AEF). From 01/30/1934 to 12/31/1937, the region is within unitary AEF colony. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were present until 1945. LIED classifies multiparty legislative elections as present after 1945. Universal male suffrage was introduced in 1957 (see also LIED). Political liberties were indicated as absent according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. Furthermore, it should be noted that both LIED and V-Dem begin collecting data for Congo-Brazzaville only in 1903. From 1903 to 1946, V-Dem's JCE is classified as moderate, indicating occasional judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

03/31/1957 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, territorial elections were held under the Loi Cadre Defferre, which introduced universal adult suffrage and a single electoral college, abolishing the discriminatory double college system.¹ The elections were competitive, resulting in a near tie between the African Socialist Movement (MSA) led by Jacques Opangault and the Democratic Union for the Defense of African Interests (UDDIA) led by Abbé Fulbert Youlou.² Following the election, a Government Council was formed with Opangault as Vice-President, marking the beginning of genuine internal self-governance where indigenous representatives exercised executive power, albeit under the supervision of the French Governor.³ This institutional shift fulfills the criteria for indirect rule, as authority was now derived from a domestic electoral mandate.

11/28/1958 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the Territorial Assembly proclaimed the Republic of the Congo as an autonomous member state of the French Community, granting the republic full authority over internal affairs while France retained jurisdiction over foreign policy, defense, and currency. However, the transition to autonomy was marked from the outset by autocratic consolidation rather than democratic governance. Fulbert Youlou of the UDDIA effectively seized power through a constitutional coup: the new constitutional laws were passed exclusively by UDDIA deputies while the opposition walked out, prompting opposition leader Jacques Opangault to denounce the process as an illegal usurpation of power. In February 1959, ethnic riots erupted in Brazzaville resulting in approximately 200 deaths, which Youlou exploited to arrest Opangault and other opposition leaders and neutralize the opposition.⁴ New legislative elections held on 06/14/1959, after systematic gerrymandering, delivered 84% of seats to the UDDIA with only 58% of the vote, leaving the MSA with a token presence of 10 out of 61 seats. Opangault was still imprisoned during these elections. Following independence on 08/15/1960, Youlou coopted Opangault into a unity government in a largely symbolic position designed to subordinate rather than accommodate the

opposition. Throughout this entire phase, formal multiparty structures nominally existed but were systematically undermined through gerrymandering, imprisonment of opposition leaders, manipulation of constitutional procedures, and ethnic mobilization. The regime is therefore classified as Electoral Autocracy throughout, with the semi-sovereign qualifier applying until 08/15/1960 when full independence was achieved. The conditions for even a minimally democratic or hybrid electoral regime were absent from the very beginning of autonomous governance (Byers/Bourgoin 2003, Marshall 2018g, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 55). On 03/26/1961, Youlou was re-elected as president without opposition and winning with 100% of the votes. Since there was no opposition, we classify this regime as a one-party autocracy. In August 1962 Youlou tried to institutionalize the one-party state which led to a round table and a few days later to general demonstrations and the arrest of trade union leaders.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held between 1960 and 1963, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Elections have been categorized as not competitive by LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI scores elections at that time as being of ambiguous freedom and fairness. Their CEI scores them as not really clean. Political liberties were absent per LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI for this period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints were categorized as Intermediate Category 2, between slight and substantial limitations. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

08/15/1963 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: Preceding this event, President Fulbert Youlou's attempt to institutionalize a one-party state faced strong opposition from trade unions. Tensions escalated when Youlou ordered the arrest of union leaders prior to a planned strike on 08/13/1963, triggering widespread anti-government riots known as the „Trois Glorieuses“ (Three Glorious Days). After France refused Youlou's request for military intervention to quell the unrest, the small army, led by mostly French officers and NCOs, withdrew support from the government and transferred power to MassambaDébat, who had been the president of the National Assembly before President Youlou forced him to resign (Decalo 1976: 140, 147-148). Massamba-Débat began steering the country toward a socialist one-party system. He promoted the formation of the National Revolutionary Movement (Mouvement National de la Révolution, MNR). On 12/11/1963, legislative elections were held under the new constitution adopted by referendum on 12/08/1963. The MNR ran as the sole party and won all 55 seats in the National Assembly. No opposition parties were permitted to compete. On 12/19/1963, Massamba-Débat was elected president by an electoral college. The MNR was formally declared the only legal political party in the parliament on 07/20/1964, effectively transforming the Republic of the Congo into a one-party state. Massamba-Débat's government adopted Marxist-Leninist ideologies, nationalized key industries, and centralized political power. In 07/1968, he arrested Captain Ngouabi, suspended the 1963 constitution, and dissolved key institutions including the parliament and the MNR Political Bureau. This resulted in a standoff between the Civil Defense and the army, ultimately forcing him to amnesty political prisoners and engage with his adversaries.⁶ According to LIED, only legislative elections were present, albeit inconsistently, and they were not categorized as multiparty. No executive elections were present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. From 1964 to 1967, V-Dem's JCE is classified as moderate, indicating occasional judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1968, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For this period, political liberties are classified as absent by LIED and can be interpreted as not really present per V-Dem's PCLI.

08/04/1968 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: President MassambaDébat was overthrown in a short-lived coup led by Captain Marien Nguabi. Poignet was sworn in as an interim president for one day before MassambaDébat was allowed to return to power.⁷ On 08/05/1968, Marien Ngouabi formed the National Revolutionary Council, which limited the power on Massamba-Débat after his

return.⁸

09/04/1968 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Communist Ideocracy: The civilian president Alphonse Massamba-Débat resigned after several days of violent clashes. Prime Minister Alfred Raoul served as acting head of state until 12/31/1968, when the CNR formally became the country's supreme authority and Captain Marien Ngouabi, as head of the CNR, assumed the presidency, leaving control in the hands of Ngouabi, who had gradually taken control of the government and defeated paramilitary forces loyal to the president during the preceding two months (Decalo 1976: 152-155).⁹ Upon assuming office, President Ngouabi renamed the nation as the People's Republic of the Congo, proclaiming it as Africa's inaugural Marxist-Leninist state. Additionally, he established the Congolese Workers' Party (Parti Congolais du Travail, PCT) as the exclusive legal political entity in the country.¹⁰ According to LIED, only legislative elections were present, albeit inconsistently, and they were not categorized as multiparty. No executive elections were present. Until 1978, according to Polity5, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Since 1979, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the year 1969, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1970-1972, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. From 1973 to 1976, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. For 1977 and 1978, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. From 1979 to 1989, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. For the year 1990, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1991, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Moreover, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate that political liberties were absent in this regime period.

02/25/1991 End Communist Ideocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: The National Conference declared its sovereignty, which Sassou-Nguesso accepted, but faced demonstrations and widespread popular opposition. Eventually, Sassou-Nguesso and the PCT agreed to a National Conference where the opposition had control. The Conference selected Andre Milongo, a former World Bank official, to lead the interim government that would oversee the transition to democracy (Clark 1994: 50-53, Clark 1997a: 68, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 55, Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 21-22). For the time of transition, LIED classifies no multiparty executive or legislative elections as present. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI indicates the political liberties as somewhat present, LIED still codes them as absent. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

07/19/1992 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: The transition was completed with the victory of one of the opposition parties in the multi-party legislative and presidential elections held in June and July 1992 (Clark 1994: 50-53, Clark 1997a: 68, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 55, Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 22). The Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS), led by Pascal Lissouba, who won the presidential election, won a plurality of seats.¹¹ He formed a government in coalition

with the PCT. The third political force (Mouvement Congolais pour la Démocratie et le Développement Intégral, MCDDI) formed an oppositional coalition (Union for Democratic Renewal, URD) under the leadership of Bernard Kolélas (Fleischhacker 1999).¹² Even with organizational challenges and delays, the transition process led to what seemed like a peaceful transfer of power. However, shortly after the installation of the new government, its fresh institutions became gridlocked due to conflicting elite interests (Fleischhacker 1999). Essentially the political sphere was a tripolar system, consisting of MCDDI with the URD, UPADS and PCT. These parties were fundamentally opposed, and each aimed for supremacy. Because of a conflict about minister posts, the PCT joined the URD and therefore formed an anti-government coalition, which nominated its own Prime Minister. This conflict resulted in the dissolution of the National Assembly and new parliamentary elections in June 1993. The military was forced to intervene, to force the parties to build a national unity government in the meantime (Fleischhacker 1999). On 05/02 and 06/03/ 1993 parliamentary elections were held. The first round resulted in a victory for the UPADS and Pascal Lissouba. The opposition boycotted the second round and raised allegations of electoral fraud. The first Brazzaville-Congolese Civil War, which lasted from 11/02/1993 till 01/30/1994, broke out because of these unresolved claims of fraud.¹³ The groundwork for a peaceful resolution was later established through the selective conduct of new elections, designed to rectify the shortcomings of the 1993 elections (Fleischhacker 1999). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED classifies elections for this period as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores elections as somewhat free and fair while their CEI scores them as not really clean. Per FH, for 1992 and 1993, the country scores between 6 and 7, is categorized by FH as partly free, we interpret the total score as rather free. For the rest of the regime period, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to V-Dem's PCLI in this period. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. Until 1996, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1997, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. Due to the severe deficits in the electoral process, which even resulted in violence, we classify this period as electoral autocracy.

10/14/1997 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Insurgents led by former president Sassou-Nguesso, who represented northern ethnic groups, succeeded in overthrowing a civilian government headed by Pascal Lissouba, with the backing of southern ethnic groups (French 1997, Bazenguissa-Ganga 1998, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 55). The militias launched a civil war against the regime. Shortly thereafter Nguesso declared himself president. Although Lissouba fled and Nguesso consolidated, fighting persisted for several years. Sassou-Nguesso named a new, broadly representative transitional government but abolished the position of prime minister and initially reserved the defense portfolio for himself (Lansford 2021: 377). From 01/05 to 01/14/1998, the government organized the National Forum for Reconciliation, Unity, Democracy, and the Reconstruction of the Congo. Over 1.400 participants attended the forum, although a majority of them were affiliated with parties or organizations associated with the FDU. The forum approved a „flexible“ three-year transition plan towards democracy, which involved the drafting of a new constitution and conducting a national constitutional referendum. Subsequently, presidential and legislative elections were set to take place after this transition period (Lansford 2021:377). On 12/25/1999 peace agreements were signed under the auspices of President Omar Bongo of Gabon, ending the civil war, leaving 8.000-10.000 dead, around 800.000 displaced persons and a devastated country.¹⁴ Some areas of the country were still under militia control, in January 2001 the government announced a „non-exclusive national dialogue“ on a draft constitution, the peace plan, and national reconstruction. A constitutional draft was prepared and approved by the National Transition Council in September. The new basic law, which retained a

strong presidency and a bicameral parliament, was endorsed by 84 percent of the voters in a public referendum on 01/20/2002 (Lansford 2021: 378). We classify this period as Non-Electoral Transitional Regime because the government of Sassou-Nguesso and the National Transition Council, which replaced an elected legislature, were formed without an electoral process. This period only ended with the presidential elections in 2002. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. As classified by FH for the regime period until 1999, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. From 2000 onward the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. Furthermore, political liberties continued to be coded as absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI decreased into a range which indicates that political liberties were not really present.

03/10/2002 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: Presidential elections on this date mark the end of the transition period. Sassou-Nguesso, was elected for a seven-year term in the first presidential elections after the second civil war with low opposition participation. He gained 89.4 percent of the vote. Parliamentary elections were held on 05/26 and 06/20/2002 during which the president's PCT and the allied FDU won 83 seats, while indirect elections for the 66-seat Senate on 07/11 produced an even greater majority for the government (Lansford 2021:378). Serious irregularities were reported by the EU Election Observation Mission but did not impact the result.¹⁵ Sassou-Nguesso was re-elected in 2009, 2016 and 2021, although he exhausted the two-term limit imposed by the previous constitution. However, a new constitution passed by referendum in 2015 allowed him to stand for re-election. Sassou-Nguesso now holds office for nearly 40 years based on repression of opposition. The recent elections on 03/21/2021 saw a boycott from an opposition group, voter intimidation and shutdown of the internet.¹⁶ In 2024 a report by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index noted rampant corruption, commonplace repression of dissenters and a general lack of economic development. Poverty is continually increasing, now impacting over half the population despite economic growth in the oil-sector, on which the republic of Congo is largely dependent. The government has largely failed to provide basic needs and liberties to its people.¹⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this regime period, LIED classifies any election as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as not really free or fair. Their CEI scores them as not clean. Per FH's evaluation for the regime period from 2002 to 2005, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. From 2006 onward the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Political liberties were coded as absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to V-Dem's PCLI for this period. As per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. For 2003-2019, and for 2021-2022, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 2020, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 2023, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

Electoral Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Bernault 1996, Decalo 1998)

Cote D'Ivoire: see Ivory Coast

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1957_Moyen-Congo_Territorial_Assembly_election
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Socialist_Movement
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Opangault
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulbert_Youlou;
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulbert_Youlou
- ⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonse_Massamba-D%C3%A9bat#Congo_under_Massamba-D%C3%A9bat_\(1963%E2%80%931968\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonse_Massamba-D%C3%A9bat#Congo_under_Massamba-D%C3%A9bat_(1963%E2%80%931968))
- ⁷ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/congobrazzaville/47434.htm>
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marien_Ngouabi
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Republic_of_the_Congo_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marien_Ngouabi
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Republic_of_the_Congo_parliamentary_election
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Republic_of_the_Congo_parliamentary_election;
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_for_Democratic_Renewal_\(Republic_of_the_Congo\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_for_Democratic_Renewal_(Republic_of_the_Congo))
- ¹³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_the_Congo_Civil_War_\(1993%E2%80%931994\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_the_Congo_Civil_War_(1993%E2%80%931994))
- ¹⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_the_Congo_Civil_War_\(1997%E2%80%931999\)#::~:~:text=The%20elections%20concluded%20with%20Pan,PCT\)%20Sassou%20Nguesso%20running%20third](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_the_Congo_Civil_War_(1997%E2%80%931999)#::~:~:text=The%20elections%20concluded%20with%20Pan,PCT)%20Sassou%20Nguesso%20running%20third)
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002_Republic_of_the_Congo_presidential_election#::~:~:text=Elected%20President&text=Sassou%20Nguesso%20standing%20as%20the,a%20field%20of%20minor%20challengers.
- ¹⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/república-congo/freedom-world/2022>
- ¹⁷ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/COG>

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