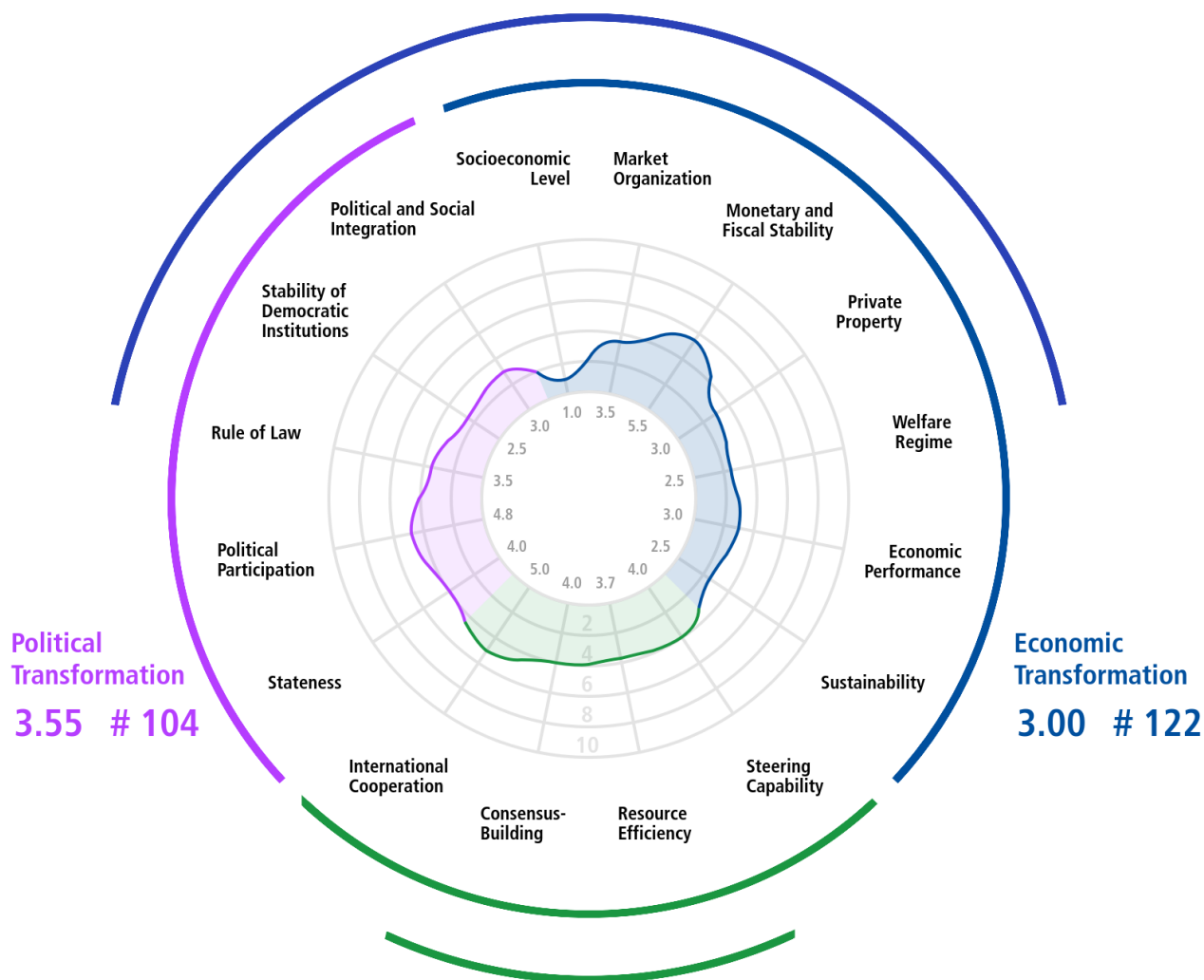


Central African Republic

Status Index

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on 1-10 scale out of 137



Governance Index

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Political Transformation
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Economic Transformation
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This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024**. It covers the period from February 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	5.6	HDI	0.404	GDP p.c., PPP \$	967
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.2	HDI rank of 189	188	Gini Index	43.0
Life expectancy	years	53.9	UN Education Index	0.368	Poverty ³	% 85.8
Urban population	%	43.1	Gender inequality ²	0.672	Aid per capita \$	119.6

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

The Central African Republic (CAR), a landlocked country in the center of Africa, possesses abundant natural and mineral resources such as gold, diamonds, uranium, phosphates, nickel, cobalt, copper and coltan. However, despite these resources, the country remains one of the poorest and most fragile in the world. Historically, weak governance and public institutions have failed to adequately provide basic services to the population. Power is primarily concentrated in the capital city of Bangui and poorly controlled, porous borders have allowed rebel movements and armed groups to proliferate in large parts of the country.

The crisis in 2013 marked a significant turning point for the CAR when a rebel alliance called the Séléka overthrew then-President François Bozizé, plunging the country into a severe crisis. The rebels committed numerous abuses against civilians, while loosely organized self-defense groups known as the Anti-Balaka fought the rebels, but also targeted Muslim civilians. The level of violence during this period far surpassed the instability witnessed in previous decades. When Faustin-Archange Touadéra assumed power in 2016, the country was in a state of devastation, with two-thirds of the territory outside government control and the already weak economy further contracted.

Thus, the period from January 2021 to January 2023 represents a critical juncture for the CAR for several reasons. The period began with a new upheaval following presidential and legislative elections held on December 27, 2020. These elections were conducted under tumultuous conditions as former President François Bozizé was barred from running, due to being prosecuted for war crimes and facing U.N. sanctions. In response, an armed group alliance called the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) launched a rebellion in December 2020, seeking to capture major towns and the capital. Although the elections proceeded as planned, some polling stations remained closed and many voters did not participate due to intimidation.

The first half of 2021 witnessed the government's efforts to push back against the CPC and regain control of the occupied territories. A state of emergency was imposed between January and August 2021. To counter rebel movements, the government changed its strategy entirely and sought new allies, finding support from Rwanda and Russia. In addition to assistance provided by the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the CAR forces received help from Rwandan troops and mercenaries from the Russian Wagner Group. In a counteroffensive, Wagner and the army were able to recapture most of the country's territory, albeit at the cost of significant civilian casualties. Wagner troops are currently deployed throughout the country, with the Russian Embassy in Bangui reporting the presence of 1,890 "instructors" from the Wagner Group in the CAR in January 2023.

In response to the CAR's close ties with Russia, France withdrew its military presence from the country, with the last French soldiers leaving in December 2022. Moreover, traditional Western partners and donors have partially frozen or delayed their budget support, demanding greater transparency in security-related spending.

On September 16, 2021, under the auspices of Rwanda and Angola, the CAR government and the heads of state of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) adopted the Luanda Roadmap. In line with this road map, the president declared a unilateral cease-fire on October 15, 2021, and a republic-wide dialogue was organized in Bangui from March 21 to 27, 2022. However, the CPC was excluded from this dialogue, leading to a general boycott by the main opposition leaders. In the following months, clashes between the national army, supported by Russian mercenaries, and CPC forces persisted in several parts of the country, despite the cease-fire. Although the intensity of the violence has decreased, there have been reports of serious human rights violations by both sides and Russian forces.

From a humanitarian perspective, the situation remains tense, with many people forced to flee their homes over the past decade. As of early 2023, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 3.4 million people in the CAR required humanitarian assistance and protection, which is over half of the total population of 5.4 million. This represents a 10% increase compared to the previous year. Violence has affected all 16 prefectures. A wide range of human rights violations have been reported, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people. By November 2022, there were over 744,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the CAR in neighboring countries, primarily Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of the Congo, according to UNHCR. This number increased compared to December 2020 (590,911) and December 2021 (630,132). Additionally, there were 509,000 internally displaced persons, a decrease from January 2022 (691,791) and January 2021 (681,913).

Economically, the country continues to suffer from the 2013 crisis and was further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CAR's economy heavily relies on exporting natural resources, primarily timber, gold, diamonds and copper, to countries outside of Africa, notably China and EU countries. This heavy dependence on a narrow range of exports makes the CAR's economy particularly vulnerable. While the economy has not yet recovered from the decline in global exports due to the pandemic, it now faces the challenge of skyrocketing fuel prices. Additionally, the reluctance of some donors to provide continuous budget support poses a growing risk, considering the significant contribution that international donors used to make to the state budget.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The post-independence history of the Central African Republic (CAR) has been marked by cycles of violence and chronic political instability. Since gaining independence, the CAR has witnessed five successful coups d'état and several attempted ones. Since 2016, it has been governed by Faustin-Archange Touadéra, who first came to power through presidential elections in 2016 and was re-elected in December 2020.

For the first 30 years after independence, France played a role in manipulating or facilitating changes in executive office. General Jean-Bédél Bokassa seized control from David Dacko in a coup d'état in 1965, declaring himself president for life and later emperor. Bokassa's regime was marked by violent repression, but the economy appeared to thrive as infrastructure was built. When France grew weary of Bokassa's excesses, David Dacko was "restored" to the presidency in 1979. However, another coup in the same year brought General André Kolingba to power, leading to a rapid economic decline and widespread salary arrears. By the end of the decade, international aid was conditioned on democratic progress, resulting in elections that led to Ange-Félix Patassé assuming power. Patassé, the first northerner to hold executive power in the CAR, faced challenges in reforming a mono-ethnic, defiant army, which ultimately mutinied. The repressive response to these mutinies laid the groundwork for the current instability in the CAR. By the mid-1990s, civil conflict had escalated into organized rebellion, accompanied by attempted coups and interference from neighboring countries. Chadian soldiers overwhelmingly supported François Bozizé's violent takeover, committing severe human rights violations. Rebels from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, called upon by Patassé to defend his presidency, also contributed to the crimes. These events reinforced the population's mistrust of foreigners and the government.

In the 2005 presidential elections, Bozizé won with 64.6% of the vote. Throughout his decade-long rule, structural problems persisted, and serious security issues arose. Major rebellions emerged in the north of the country, followed by peace efforts and state-building initiatives that the government and rebel parties often manipulated to reap advantages.

In 2011, despite significant misconduct and rigging, international partners remained quiet when Bozizé won the election. In late 2012, a broad alliance of rebel groups known as Séléka formed in the predominantly Muslim northeast, including fighters from Chad and Sudan. They captured Bangui in March 2013 and installed Michel Djotodia as the country's first Muslim president. Djotodia's Séléka committed ruthless acts of rape, murder and violence against civilians in Bangui and across the country. In response, self-defense groups called Anti-Balaka and former security forces carried out brutal revenge killings, often targeting Muslims of Arab descent. The violence during this time had a devastating impact on the CAR's fragile economy, leading to a sharp decline in the Human Development Index and a 37% shrinkage of the economy. More than 800,000 people were displaced. Djotodia was forced to step down in January 2014, and an interim president, Catherine Samba-Panza, was appointed. During this transition period, a new constitution was approved, and peaceful elections were held.

In February 2016, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, an independent presidential candidate, won the general elections with 63% of the vote. Unfortunately, violence and displacement persisted throughout 2017 and 2018, even in previously stable areas. U.N. peacekeeping missions played a central role in maintaining law and order. By the end of 2018, one in five Central Africans had been displaced.

From 2017 to 2020, armed groups driven by criminal, economic or political interests continued to assert control over the country. These groups included Anti-Balaka militias, the Union for Peace (UPC), the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central Africa (FPRC), the Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC), Révolution and Justice (RJ), and multiple former Séléka factions.

In 2019, François Bozizé returned to the CAR and announced his intention to run in the December 2020 presidential elections. However, the Constitutional Court disqualified him due to war crime charges and U.N. sanctions. Just before the elections, the CPC alliance of rebel movements took control of major cities. Despite some polling stations being unable to open, the elections were held as scheduled. Touadéra was declared the winner, securing more than 53% of the vote, but with only around one-third of eligible citizens participating. On January 13, 2021, the CPC launched an assault on Bangui but was repelled by the Central African military forces (FACA) with support from international allies, including the U.N. operation, MINUSCA, Rwandese troops, and mercenaries from the Wagner group. While Touadéra's popularity increased after the counter-attacks in 2021, his rapprochement with Russia created a rift between Bangui and traditional partners, particularly France. Following a state of emergency between January and August 2021, the government agreed to the Luanda Roadmap, mediated by Rwanda and Angola, and endorsed by the heads of state of the ICGLR. As part of this road map, Touadéra declared a unilateral cease-fire on October 15, 2021, and organized a republic-wide dialogue in March 2022, which did not include representatives from the CPC coalition.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

In the CAR, the existence of a state monopoly on the legitimate use of force has been rare. The authority and control of the state are mainly concentrated in the capital, Bangui, while the government has little power in other parts of the country. The national borders are also largely uncontrolled and vulnerable to entry by armed groups from neighboring countries. As a result, rebel movements and militias have established rule and governance where the state is absent.

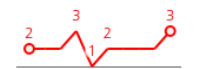
The Central African Armed Forces (FACA) have traditionally been weak and faced significant challenges in terms of resources, human capital and logistics. They heavily rely on external support for funding, materials and training, with France being a major source of support for many years. Multinational operations led by regional communities (CEMAC and CEEAC), France or the United Nations have been deployed to the CAR since 1997. In recent years, the Russian mercenary group, Wagner, has increasingly provided military support to the CAR government under an agreement signed in 2018, which includes mineral concessions as part of the exchange. The activities of Wagner mercenaries became more apparent after the incidents during the presidential and legislative elections in December 2020. Following the rejection of former President François Bozizé's candidacy, major armed groups formed the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC), with Bozizé declaring himself as the coalition's leader. CPC-affiliated militias and movements were able to seize territories in various regions of the country. To reclaim these territories, Wagner mercenaries were deployed and joined operations with FACA, MINUSCA and Rwandan troops. With their assistance, more than 20 towns and villages were reclaimed from the rebel groups and the CPC's attempt to seize Bangui in January 2021 was halted, largely due to the operations led by Wagner mercenaries. Over the following months, the Wagner Group shifted its role from primarily support and training to active interventions in confrontations with rebel movements in the country. By April 2021, most rebel strongholds had been reached and recovered and major roads were once again under control. However, it became

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

3

'06 '24 10



apparent that Wagner mercenaries were increasingly acting independently of the CAR government, although they continued to support FACA with training and coordination. As of January 2023, according to the Russian Embassy in Bangui, there were 1,890 Wagner instructors in the CAR.

The recovery of significant parts of the territory and restored control over roads have increased the popularity of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, now seen as a strong leader. Although the military operations in 2021 led to a strong crackdown on rebel movements that had previously controlled two-thirds of the country, it is difficult to determine whether the state has fully reestablished a monopoly on the use of force. These military operations relied heavily on foreign support and it remains uncertain to what extent the state will be able to maintain the current situation. Of particular concern are the abuses committed by Wagner mercenaries and state forces against civilians.

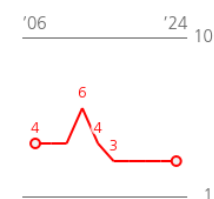
The existence of the nation-state in the CAR is unquestioned. Neither the government nor the international community challenges the concept of (re)building a nation-state. Even the rebel movements that regularly challenge the government acknowledge the state itself. Their objective is rather to topple the ruling political elite and seize control over the country, particularly the capital as its political center.

Traditionally, different population groups have competed for hegemony and denied civil rights to others. Citizenship has been silently manipulated for decades based on ethnicity. Individuals with Muslim backgrounds or Muslim names have often encountered difficulties in obtaining birth certificates and state identity cards. This antagonism is primarily rooted in decades of uncontrolled migration from Chad and Sudan due to weakly monitored borders. It reached an extreme during the 2013 crisis when the predominantly Christian Anti-Balaka self-defense militia openly opposed predominantly Muslim combatants from the Séléka rebel groups. Consequently, the citizenship of many Muslim Central Africans was questioned, and in some cases, rescinded. The citizenship status of many internally displaced persons and refugees remains unclear.

In general, legislation in the CAR is not substantially influenced by religious dogmas. The country largely adheres to the laicist tradition inherited from its former French colonial power. However, certain conflicts have religious overtones. Nevertheless, placing excessive emphasis on the religious dimension of the prolonged crisis in the Central African Republic risks overlooking the fundamental causes of violence, which include social, economic and political problems that have plagued the country since it became independent. Nonetheless, political actors have frequently exploited and manipulated ethnoreligious differences and tensions to serve their own interests. Frictions along religious lines, particularly between Christians and Muslims, have always existed. The long-standing interference of Chad in the politics and security of its neighbor has not only intensified anti-Chadian sentiments but has also resulted in disadvantages for Muslim individuals.

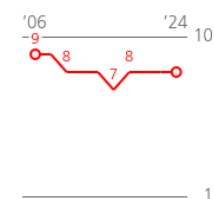
State identity

3



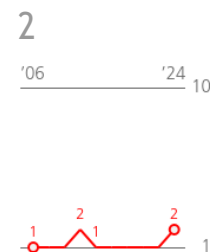
No interference of religious dogmas

8



State administration in the CAR is primarily concentrated in the capital. Its presence weakens or completely disappears as one moves away from Bangui. The insufficiency of state administration stems from the long-standing inability of the government to extend its reach to remote areas, which have been partly controlled by non-state actors such as rebel groups. Additionally, a lack of basic infrastructure such as roads and transportation, as well as poor security for state officials, contribute to this issue. As a result, the provision of essential services like communication, education, health care (with only 13.6% of the population having access to sanitation in 2020), electricity (15.5% in 2020), and water (6.2% in 2020) is incomplete or severely lacking in large parts of the country. State-provided legal, financial and security functions are nearly nonexistent outside the capital. President Touadéra has attempted to address this problem by reintroducing the concept of “ministres résidents,” previously introduced by former President Bozizé, with the aim of strengthening the connection between ministries and their respective provinces. However, these efforts have not yielded significant results thus far. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches and international donors have partially filled the gap and provided basic services. In December 2020, the government passed a law to restructure the country, increasing the number of prefectures from 16 to 20. However, the anticipated improvement in state administration has not materialized. Public services remain fragmented and weak. In places where the government does exercise power, major challenges it faces include a lack of basic resources, such as functional office buildings and office supplies.

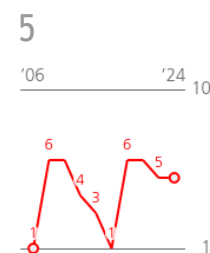
Basic administration



2 | Political Participation

In terms of political changes, the CAR is characterized by a succession of democratic changeovers and coups d'état. The first democratic elections being held in 1992 did not mean that the period of violent transitions of power had ended.

Free and fair elections



The current president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, came to power in the first elections after the 2013 crisis and a transition period under interim President Catherine Samba-Panza. He was re-elected in December 2020. The presidential elections received international attention when the Constitutional Court rejected the candidacy of former President François Bozizé. The court justified its decision by arguing that Bozizé did not satisfy the “good morality” requirement for candidates, due to an international warrant for his arrest and U.N. sanctions against him for alleged assassinations, torture and other crimes. Bozizé thus did not meet the requirements to run for president, according to the court. This triggered a new wave of unrest: several rebel movements formed a coalition and launched an offensive with a view to preventing the elections from taking place. The CPC attacked major towns, such as Bambari and Bangasso, which led to a series of battles. Supported by MINUSCA and Rwandan and Wagner Group soldiers, the CAR’s armed forces managed to push back the rebels and prevented them from entering Bangui. However,

with rising insecurity in many parts of the country and the CPC's ongoing attacks on several cities, the elections were held under very difficult circumstances since 14% of polling stations were closed; in 29 out of 71 sous-préfectures, no voting took place, and in six sous-préfectures, polling stations had to close early due to voter intimidation. Nevertheless, the national election authority (ANE) reported a participation rate of 76.31%, counting only registered voters in polling stations where voting took place which accounts for 910,000 out of a total of 1.8 million registered voters. The Constitutional Court declared Touadéra winner with 53.92% of the vote in the first round. The Constitutional Court partially invalidated the preliminary results of the simultaneous legislative elections, raising doubts about the integrity and fairness of the process. The international community acknowledged the elections' results. The opposition contested them, arguing that 70% of voters were prevented from voting due to the tense security climate and complaining of massive fraud, the opposition contested the election results. Given the security situation, while existing on paper, elements of free and fair elections such as universal suffrage and equal media access are not fully guaranteed.

The main veto actors that could hinder the government from effectively governing are the armed groups and external actors. Since CAR's independence in 1960, the former colonial power, France, has continued to influence its domestic politics and the country's political and regime changes. However, since the mid-1990s, in line with a general reorientation of its Africa policy, France has gradually reduced its presence and troops in the CAR.

Under President Touadéra, France has continued to distance itself from its former colony, just as in other African countries, such as Mali and Burkina Faso. The current government has sought new allies and found them notably in Russia. Whereas France assured the government's major military support was over a long period, Touadéra now relies on support from the Wagner Group, which is helping him to push back rebel groups and reclaim control over parts of the country. In a similar direction, Touadéra implemented a number of symbolic measures. For instance, in November 2022, he put an end to the deanery, a diplomatic privilege granted to France since the CAR's independence. In response to Russia's increasing role in the country, France completely withdrew its troops from the CAR over the last two years and the last French soldiers left the country in mid-December 2022.

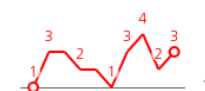
For the last 20 years, association and assembly rights have been guaranteed by law.

The current constitution, in place since 2015, upholds these rights under Article 12, which stipulates that all citizens have the right to freely create associations, groups, companies and public utilities, as long as these are in line with the law. There is also a law on political parties and associations. However, the U.S. State Department reported that the government did not always respect these rights. Demonstrations since 2013 have often turned violent and either degenerated into intergroup violence or attacks on peacekeepers. Outside of Bangui, across the rural CAR, de facto authorities (rebels and militia groups) have restricted (often violently) the free

Effective power to govern

3

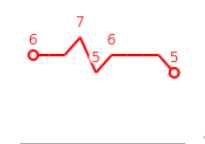
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Association / assembly rights

5

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association and assembly rights the constitution protects on paper. The recent introduction of a state of emergency between January and August 2021 seriously undermined assembly rights. Under the guise of combatting the CPC rebel coalition, the government restricted political parties' and civil groups' activities. The redeployed military and Wagner soldiers have considerably reduced civilian spaces for critical investigations and discussing matters in all regions the army has repossessed.

The CAR's constitution guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press. However, in practice, these remain rather limited and the government has always tended to control much of the media and its content. The most important source of information is radio; there are numerous both public and private radio stations that operate nationwide. Radio Centrafrique has been the main public radio in existence since 1958. In contrast, there are only two television networks, one public and one private. The print media is comprised of about 60 publications, which are mainly available in the capital Bangui. Internet has become an ever more important source of information in urban areas as well as for the diaspora.

In 2020, a new law on freedom of communication was adopted to protect journalists and guarantee freedom in the media. However, many journalists openly criticized the law's weak implementation and limited effects in terms of ensuring the practice of independent, fact-based journalism.

External actors also matter: Russians are buying up the press and pro-government actors intimidate (possibly with Russian support) critical investigation of Russian and government activities.

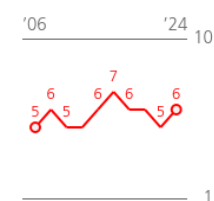
In 2021, Reporters Without Borders ranked the CAR 126th out of 180 countries. In 2022, the CAR moved up to 101st out of 180 countries. If we consider that it was ranked 132nd in 2020 and 145th in 2019, there seems to be more or less constant improvement. However, prior to the crisis in 2013, the CAR had reached 62nd out of 179 (year 2012).

3 | Rule of Law

Since independence in 1960 (and with a brief interruption between 1976 and 1979 during the empire established by Jean-Bédél Bokassa), the CAR has had a presidential system. The current constitution has been in place since 2015 and continues to ensure the separation of powers. It even includes the addition of an upper house of parliament (the Senate), which could further strengthen the state's legislative functions. The Senate has, however, still not been established. There is no tradition of political checks and balances in the CAR. The president is not used to having a parliament that independently questions the administration's actions.

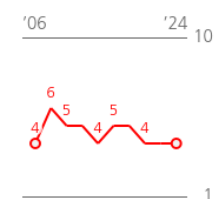
Freedom of expression

6



Separation of powers

4



In addition, the separation of powers has frequently been challenged during states of emergency. The most recent one was declared on January 21, 2021 in the context of fighting the CPC. It was only lifted in August 2021.

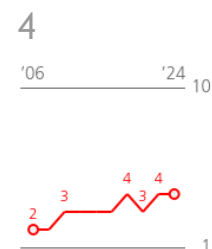
During these six months, the police were able to enter private homes, conduct house searches and arrest individuals without going through the normal legal process and without prior authorization from the public prosecutor.

Despite the constant problem of a shortage of judges, prosecutors and lawyers, as well as resources, the Constitutional Court has repeatedly attempted to play a more prominent role in government than it has in the past and to demonstrate its ability to perform oversight and checks and balances – with and without success. In spring 2020, for instance, the court stopped the president’s plans to postpone the elections because of the pandemic. Again, in September 2022, the Constitutional Court decided to block the president’s constitutional reform to allow him to run for a third term in 2025, calling it unconstitutional. In addition, the court requested that the Senate, outlined in the 2015 constitution, should first be established. The government responded by ordering the retirement by the end of 2022 of the court’s president, Danielle Darlan, aged 70. Although Darlan refused, her appointment in 2017 was revoked by a decree citing a “permanent impediment.”

The judiciary, historically understaffed and weak, has been negatively affected by the repeated years of turmoil and domestic crises. Legal records have often been destroyed during or after rebellions or coups d’état, which has created a feeling of impunity among the population. This feeling is further enhanced by the poor functioning of prisons and their limited infrastructure and security, which has resulted in multiple prison breaks over the last several years. Another problem is the wide gap between the capital and the countryside, with only few functioning courts outside Bangui. Given the population’s limited trust in the state and national police, criminal activities are often not reported. As a result, perpetrators often are not prosecuted, but instead continue to live close to their victims.

In 2015, the Special Criminal Court (SCC) was established to facilitate the investigation of crimes against humanity and deliver justice to victims of criminal activities committed in the country. The court is part of the domestic judicial system, but its members are international and Central African judges, prosecutors and administrators. The SCC is unique and unprecedented in the history of the Central African Republic. Especially since 2017, the court has played an increasingly important role in prosecuting crimes committed during crises and conflicts. Even if it continues to face a number of challenges and still mainly depends upon international funding, a series of steps have been taken in order to protect its credibility, independence and impartiality. The SCC serves as an example to other countries with pending investigations of international crimes in their national

Independent
judiciary



systems. On December 28, 2022, the CAR parliament renewed the SCC's mandate for another five years.

Corruption in the CAR is endemic and linked to a combination of different factors. Richly endowed with natural resources such as diamonds, gold and uranium, among others, the country suffers from a weak administration. Civil servants are paid badly or on an irregular basis and the allocation of resources remains largely opaque. In addition, the judiciary is weak when it comes to prosecuting corruption cases.

The CAR's constitutional framework for combatting corruption is also weak. The 2015 constitution includes two main anti-corruption provisions. Article 58 on Financial Disclosure requires members of the government to publicly declare before and after entry into office their income for the Constitutional Court's review. Article 146 on Responsible Governance provides for the transparent and equitable distribution of resources. To achieve this goal, the article foresees the creation of the High Authority for Good Governance (HAGG) to introduce equity and transparency into resource allocation. The HAGG was created by President Touadéra in 2016. Over the last six years, the commission's work has been however difficult due to a weak judicial system and the fact that it reports directly to the president rather than to an independent body. While cases of abuse occasionally attract public censure, they are generally not adequately prosecuted.

Civil rights are guaranteed by the constitution, under Titre 1: les bases fondamentales de la société. However, fundamental rights are repeatedly violated, both by the state and non-state actors, including the rebel groups. According to the OCHA, sexual violence has significantly increased. The high level of insecurity in vast parts of the country is particularly conducive to gender-based violence and further worsens the country's deeply rooted gender inequality, abuses of power, and harmful norms.

In 2021, 2.8 million Central Africans, corresponding to 57% of an estimated population of 4.9 million needed humanitarian assistance or protection. Of these, almost three-quarters are in acute need, meaning that the physical and moral survival of 1.9 million people, 39% of the population, is at risk.

Over the period under review, the number of human rights abuses increased due to the intensive fighting of FACA and its allies against the rebel movements in the country. Especially members of the Wagner Group have repeatedly been accused of human rights violations and violence against the population. The United Nations has published a number of reports that emphasized and condemned these actions in the CAR. In October 2021, the government acknowledged for the first time the responsibility of its Russian allies in committing these crimes against civilian populations.

Prosecution of
office abuse

3

'06 '24 10



Civil rights

3

'06 '24 10



4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

The CAR’s constitution provides for a number of formally democratic institutions, most of which are also in place, in particular, the presidency, the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court. However, the country does not have a democratic system in practice. In addition, the state remains the largest employer in the

country. For years, public administration and institutions have suffered from privilege-seeking and corruption, which has resulted in weak accountability, transparency, and confidentiality. Touadéra has set ambitious goals to reform and strengthen the public sector.

All relevant actors in the political system (government bodies, political parties, and civic organizations), claim that they are generally committed to the state’s democratic institutions

and processes. Nevertheless, the politico-military crises and political instability that have constantly shaken the CAR have left their marks on the political system, calling into question this commitment. Post-crisis initiatives to relaunch national dialogues and thus increase confidence in state institutions have been challenged for different reasons, mainly due to the exclusion of some actors from the process. The most recent example, the republic-wide dialogue in March 2022 outlined in the Luanda Roadmap, generated a similar result. Several political opposition parties and civil society organizations boycotted the event after the CPC was not invited to participate.

Touadéra’s project to reform the constitution in order to be able to run for a third presidency is highly contested by the opposition and civil society organizations. In 2023, a referendum shall be held on this issue.

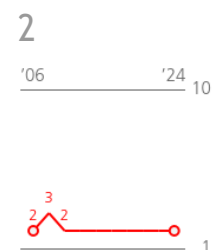
5 | Political and Social Integration

There was a one-party system in the first decades after independence. A multiparty system was introduced in 1991 with a law on political parties was passed in July of that year. A decree signed in 2005 further regulated, albeit rather insufficiently, the status of political parties in the country.

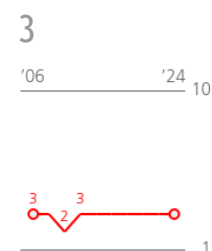
The number of political parties was considerably high, and the party system unstable and not based on ideological differences. Thus, fragmentation is relatively high, institutionalization very low (including high voter volatility) and ideological polarization hardly exists.

According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, in 2019, there were more than 90 political parties in the Central African Republic. The president’s party, the United Hearts Movement, was only founded in 2018. Generally, political parties seem to be more the private appendages of opportunistic politicians seeking

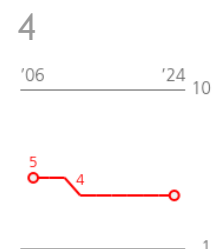
Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



Party system

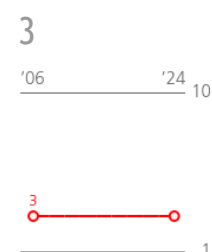


clientelistic networks for personal entitlement than a plurality of representatives of the population. Indeed, civilian political parties have never been particularly robust due to their own lack of capacity. No civilian party has been able to represent the interests of marginalized minorities, and most suffered severe internal crises. Traditional institutions representing distinct populations were repeatedly destroyed during colonial and post-colonial times. Under President Touadéra, several initiatives have been taken in order to better regulate the party system in the country. As one of the requirements of the Khartoum Agreement from February 2019, the National Assembly passed a new law on political parties and the status of the opposition in February 2020. In order to avoid the plethoric formation of political parties as in the past, the law states that parties need to obtain at least 5% of the votes in legislative or municipal elections in order to remain in existence. In addition, parties have to maintain accounts. The opposition welcomed the new law as a means to better define and regulate the rights and obligations of political parties. The government passed an additional decree in November 2020, setting out conditions to grant state subsidies to political parties. Among these conditions, political parties' accounts have to be subject to control by an authorized body. As an incentive to increase women's involvement in politics, 15% of subsidies are allocated to political parties whose female members are elected to parliament and 10% to parties with women on municipal councils.

Most societal groups in the Central African Republic do not have clear representation in formalized interest groups. As a consequence, important social interests, such as those of the rural population, and also youth and women, are under-represented in public debates. In contrast, those who are well organized, such as civil servants who have set up a relatively strong trade union movement, have their concerns heard and wield some influence. These groups significantly contributed to the democratic transition in 1993 and were able to push for payment when salary arrears for civil servants occurred in 2015 and 2016. Churches are also influential. Some cases have shown that interest group creation and activity tends to follow money and power. Whenever funding from the international community has focused on a particular area, such as human rights, social cohesion and rural revival, an increase in the number of associations and NGOs active on the ground occurs. Apparently, the government supports counter-unions to undermine traditional unions' power. Many social actors seem to opportunistically align with the government, thereby undermining the causes to which they officially manifest adherence.

Approving democratic norms and procedures may seem rather unlikely for a largely traumatized population that has experienced years of constant unrest since the last successful coup in 2013. People have complained that democracy was never really given a chance in the CAR. Although concrete survey data are not available, the rather high participation rate in elections may indicate that democratic norms are approved by a majority of the population, but probably less by minorities that never feel represented. What is available in the absence of survey data are local

Interest groups



Approval of democracy
n/a

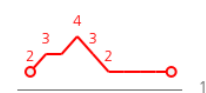
consultations held prior to the Bangui Forum in 2015. These indicate that citizens approve of democratic ideals. In the last presidential elections in December 2020, a surprisingly high share of the population registered to vote. Voter turnout was however rather low in the end, due to the sudden increase in violence following the CPC rebellion, voter intimidation and the closure of many polling stations. Nevertheless, voter registration figures certainly show that the population was willing to participate in voting.

The CAR and its population are severely affected by a long succession of conflicts and crises. The rebellion and subsequent military-political crisis in 2013 fostered a divide between Muslims and Christians and caused fragmentation in the country and a deterioration of social ties between different communities. The repeated crises have, moreover, led to internal displacements, violence against the population and human rights abuses, and the worsening of an already considerable weak infrastructure. This has further weakened the resilience of the very poor and plunged them into a situation of extreme fragility and vulnerability. Social cohesion and trust are particularly low in rural areas and among other populations with few opportunities, with significant disparities in terms of poverty and access to basic services.

Moreover, the yearlong presence of armed groups has challenged solidarity. Rural communities are mainly composed of agropastoral farmers, who base their peaceful coexistence and economy on specific socio-cultural lifestyles, values and habits. The presence and activities of rebels have profoundly affected these systems, especially as conflicts stirred up religious and ethnic issues that previously had not been significant. As a result, in many areas, tensions between farmers and herders developed quite quickly and turned into violent conflicts within communities. For example, predatory armed groups in agropastoral areas have significantly undermined the inter-community cohesion that allowed for the amicable management of transhumance-related conflicts based on traditional governance models.



Social capital



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

All relevant indicators of socioeconomic development in the CAR are at very low levels, which means that the country consistently ranks among the world's 10 worst performers. According to the September 2022 release of the Human Development Index (HDI 2021), the CAR was ranked 188th out of 191 countries, the same rank as in 2019 and 2017 (the CAR was ranked 187th out of 188 in 2015). The index score of 0.404 in 2021 represented a second year of decline from 0.411 in 2019, before the pandemic impacted the country's economy and a security crisis in the first half of 2021 interrupted the CAR's main road for International trade. The current HDI score is only slightly higher than the levels in 2012 (HDI 0.388), prior to the Séléka rebellion and the ensuing violence of 2013.

Question Score

Socioeconomic barriers



Poverty remains pervasive and structural in the CAR. GDP per capita (PPP, constant 2017 international \$) was \$838 in 2021, slightly lower than \$848 and \$862 in 2020 and 2019, respectively. Despite some recovery from the 2013 crisis, its stagnant level remains below the \$1,209 (PPP, constant 2017 international \$) reached in 2012 before the breakdown of political order that left the economy in ruins.

According to World Bank calculations, the share of the population living below the international poverty line (\$2.15/day in PPP, constant 2017 international \$) has remained around 70% with no signs of improvement in recent years. These figures are based on empirical data from 2008 and should be interpreted with caution as the effects of the 2013 crisis are likely underestimated. More recent survey data from 2018/2019 from the UNDP Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022 shows that over 55% of the population lives in severe multidimensional poverty, the fifth highest rate among all countries reviewed since 2010.

In general, urban residents, especially those in Bangui, have historically fared better than people in rural areas. Although there is limited recent empirical data on economic inequality (income and property), it is evident that inequality remains high. There is little reason to think that the CAR's Gini coefficient for income has improved since its last evaluation in 2008, when the CAR had a Gini coefficient of 56.3, placing it among the most unequal countries in the world. Women also face significant exclusion from economic opportunities, as indicated by the Gender Inequality Index of 0.672 in 2021.

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
GDP	\$ M	2221.3	2326.7	2516.5	2382.6
GDP growth	%	3.1	0.9	0.9	0.0
Inflation (CPI)	%	2.7	1.7	4.3	5.6
Unemployment	%	5.8	6.4	6.5	6.4
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	1.2	0.1	0.2	1.0
Export growth	%	2.0	-2.8	-5.5	-6.5
Import growth	%	4.9	1.0	-10.3	7.0
Current account balance	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Public debt	% of GDP	47.1	43.4	47.6	51.8
External debt	\$ M	849.4	898.7	1115.5	-
Total debt service	\$ M	30.4	16.1	17.5	-

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	3.5	-0.1	-4.0	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	8.3	8.7	8.2	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	8.0	9.7	9.1	8.3
Public education spending	% of GDP	1.8	2.1	1.9	2.1
Public health spending	% of GDP	0.8	1.2	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	1.8	1.9	2.2	1.7

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

The fragile security environment in the CAR has improved since the failed attempts by armed groups to seize power in Bangui at the beginning of 2021. This temporarily disrupted the vital Douala-Bangui corridor responsible for 80% of external trade. The temporary closure of the RN3 Highway in early 2021 resulted in inflation, which eased after the road reopened. However, the country experienced another price shock due to rising food and fuel prices on the world market.

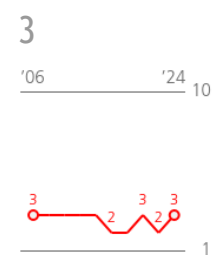
The poor condition of and slow improvements in the national road network continue to hinder the recovery of the country's fragile economy, despite the state's increase in control over its territory, which has removed the main obstacle to increased market participation beyond the capital region.

Except for urban centers and certain mining areas, the CAR's economy remains largely informal, although there are no reliable quantitative estimates on the share of the formal and informal sectors. According to the FAO, the subsistence economy provided a livelihood for nearly 75% of the population in 2019.

Urban centers, especially Bangui, are witnessing increased market-based competition, particularly in sectors catering to the international community, such as real estate services, restaurants and other service industries.

According to FAO estimates, the country's forestry resources cover around 22.3 million hectares, accounting for approximately 36% of its territory. The exploitation of some of these resources, which encompass various species, accounted for over 60% of the country's total export earnings in 2021. Additionally, the CAR possesses significant mineral resources, including gold and gemstones (particularly diamonds), which constitute about a quarter of its exports. Other minerals with significant

Market
organization



economic potential include uranium, iron and copper. While these resources remain largely untapped, there has been an increase in copper extraction in the past two years. Gold and diamond mining are predominantly carried out by a partially unregulated artisanal sector. Diamond exports increased following the regional lifting of restrictions imposed through the Kimberley Process. In partnership with the IMF, the government has continued fiscal reforms that were interrupted by the 2013 coup and subsequent conflicts.

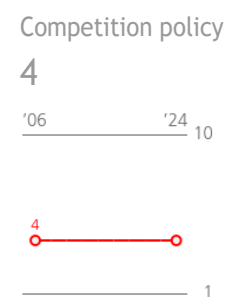
In its latest review of the CAR's performance, the IMF noted that international donors have postponed the disbursement of budget support, seeking greater transparency in the government's security-related spending. Donor reluctance and scrutiny can be seen as spillovers from global geopolitical tensions. This poses significant fiscal and social risks considering the country's heavy reliance on budget support. The sharp deterioration in trade observed in 2022, driven by food and fuel price shocks, exposed existing vulnerabilities and further limited policy options.

In January 2023, the IMF completed its Article IV Mission to the Central African Republic. As a preliminary finding, the IMF observed that the post-COVID-19 recovery has been severely disrupted by fuel shortages and the soaring food prices throughout 2022. The ongoing food crisis has worsened, requiring immediate humanitarian and budgetary assistance. Given potential spillovers from the geopolitical tensions surrounding the war in Ukraine, the CAR's political options appear increasingly precarious.

The CAR is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and has adopted the community's regional competition regime. However, there is no formal national authority or regulation for merger control in the CAR. Enforcing competition regulations in the country is challenging, and the regulation of monopolies and oligopolies is sporadic. This issue is particularly evident in certain sectors of the service industry, such as telecommunications and banking. The government does not prioritize addressing monopolistic distortions in the market, as there is limited investor interest and some essential goods are not adequately provided.

During periods when the vital international transport corridor connecting the CAR to the Douala port in Cameroon was blocked, either due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 or rebel activity in the first half of 2021, prices for basic products in Bangui significantly increased. The government did not engage in regulatory intervention, highlighting its limited control over the country's economy.

It should be noted that the CAR is not a member of the International Competition Network.



The CAR, landlocked and with limited internal transportation infrastructure, has always faced challenges due to its isolated geographic position and heavy reliance on a single international transport corridor. This dependence makes the costs of foreign trade relatively expensive.

In 2020, exports experienced a sharp contraction, reaching just over one-fifth of the approximately \$200 million recorded in 2017. This decline was largely attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, trade has since rebounded, and in 2021, total exports reached approximately \$90 million, despite interruptions in the main transport corridor during the first half of the year. It is likely that exports further recovered in 2022, as security along main roads improved. However, the significant rise in global food and energy prices during this period resulted in a severe deterioration in the CAR's terms of trade, foreign trade balance and overall economic recovery.

The CAR's membership in CEMAC includes a set of common trade rules, which have the potential to raise trade standards if more effectively implemented.

Alongside its selective integration into the global market, the CAR has also been deeply connected to the illicit global trade in small arms, poached animals and animal products (such as ivory, scales and horns), despite various embargoes. Porous borders provide opportunities for rebel groups and criminal gangs to profit from illegal trade and stolen goods, particularly diamonds. Herders, many of whom are armed and come from Chad and Sudan, are often accused of smuggling illegal products, sometimes in collusion with various rebel groups. In zones not compliant with the Kimberley Process, such as the eastern part of the CAR, the diamond trade is partially controlled by rebel groups that smuggle the stones through various channels to Sudan, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, the government's increased territorial control since 2021, coupled with the expansion of zones compliant with the Kimberley Process, has significantly reduced the share of illegally traded diamonds from the CAR.

Reliable, up-to-date information on the banking sector in the CAR is scarce in the public domain. According to World Bank data, the bank capital-to-assets ratio remained relatively stable at around 14% in 2021 compared to 2020. The percentage of non-performing loans has shown a positive trend, declining from over 30% in 2015 to 16.1% in 2019, and further dropping to 13.9% in 2021, approaching pre-2013 levels.

The CAR's membership in CEMAC and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) anchors the country to international banking standards, despite its small economy. However, the CAR has the smallest financial sector in the entire CEMAC region and the weakest ratio of population to bank counters in Central Africa. Banks are mainly concentrated in Bangui, with some presence in Berbérati and Bouar. Currently, there are four commercial banks (Ecobank, CBCA, BSIC and BPMC) and at least two active microfinance institutes. The Banque des Etats de

Liberalization of foreign trade

3

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Banking system

4

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l’Afrique Centrale (BEAC) serves as the central bank for the six countries in the CEMAC community. The common currency and monetary policy of the BEAC remain linked to the euro and the Banque de France, but there are growing reservations across the region, including in the CAR, about this. The banking sector is theoretically well-regulated under the supervision of the Commission Bancaire de l’Afrique Centrale (COBAC), which is associated with the BEAC. However, the market is poorly differentiated and offers limited opportunities for domestic investors.

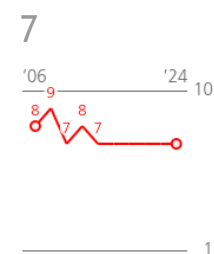
In early 2022, the Touadéra government introduced a bill that was unanimously adopted in parliament, making bitcoin a legal tender in the CAR. This move was surprising, considering the relatively low internet access rate, just above 10%, and questions persist about its compatibility with CEMAC requirements. President Touadéra has since developed ambitious plans to establish a national blockchain-based currency called the Sango, although public listing of the coin has been postponed. Nonetheless, the government continues to pursue its goal of creating favorable conditions for blockchain-related financial services.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

The regional central bank, Banque des Etats de l’Afrique centrale (BEAC), which focuses on controlling inflation and maintaining the peg of the CFA franc to the euro (around XAF 655 = €1), manages monetary policy in the CAR. The BEAC’s monetary policy largely follows the stance of the European Central Bank (ECB) and is influenced by the availability of foreign exchange reserves. In response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECB implemented a stimulus package in March 2020 to provide liquidity. In line with this accommodative stance, the BEAC lowered its main policy rate to 3.25%. However, due to renewed inflationary pressures in 2021, the BEAC increased the main policy rate to 3.5% in late 2021, followed by two additional 0.5% hikes in 2022, bringing the rate to 4.5%, a level not seen in the past decade.

The real effective exchange rate continued its upward trend, reaching 130.5 in 2021, indicating a growing disparity with other CEMAC countries. In 2020, disruptions in supply chains caused by the pandemic, including the temporary closure of the border with Cameroon, had inflationary effects. Despite weak demand, consumer prices moderately increased by 1.7%. In 2021, further inflationary pressure (4.3% CPI) resulted from security-related interruptions in the CAR’s vital transport corridor with Cameroon, followed by imported inflation due to rising food and fuel prices in the global market in 2022 (estimated inflation: 6.5%). Although inflation at these levels remains below the highs of 2014 – 15, it exceeds the convergence rate of 3% set by CEMAC. In recent years, there has been criticism of monetary stabilization policies within the CFA franc zone. Various deviations from the status quo can be observed, including the introduction of bitcoin as alternative legal tender in the CAR.

Monetary stability



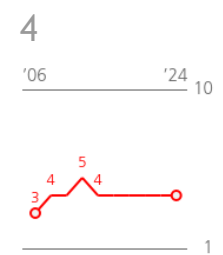
The budgetary situation in 2021 worsened due to a decline in government revenue caused by trade interruptions and the postponement of budgetary support from donors. This was a result of post-election political tensions and concerns over transparency in security spending. However, prudent government spending and postponements to infrastructure investments helped stabilize the budgetary situation. Despite improvements expected by the IMF for 2022 and 2023, a fuel and food crisis in 2022 undermined progress. The IMF was expected to grant an Extended Credit Facility (ECF) by the end of 2022. This would encourage financing from other donors and multilateral partners. In recent years, international donor grants have accounted for around 8% of GDP or nearly 50% of total government revenue. The public debt burden is projected to remain stable, with the external share accounting for 70% and mainly held by multilateral and bilateral creditors. The non-disbursement of planned budget support and increased import prices have contributed to an increased current account deficit, which is expected to narrow in 2023 with increased exports.

The country's public finances continue to face deficits due to multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, road interruptions in 2021, and food and fuel price increases. Furthermore, the escalating conflict in Ukraine has led to increased scrutiny from international donors, requiring the government to demonstrate improvements in fiscal management and progress in implementing the National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding. The government has taken steps to repay arrears to small and medium-sized enterprises and reduce domestic arrears to pension funds. However, without donor contributions, the fiscal deficit of the state budget remains at unsustainable levels. Even with budgetary support, the deficit has widened from 3.4% in 2020 to 6.0% in 2021 and is estimated to remain at 5.7% in 2022 due to growing reluctance in donor support. The overall public debt reached 47.6% of GDP in 2021 and is projected to increase to 54.8% in 2022, breaking the previous downward trend observed from 2017 to 2020 when the public debt-to-GDP ratio decreased from over 50% to 43.4%.

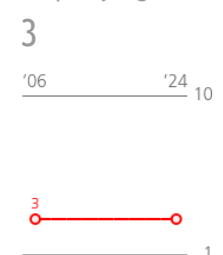
9 | Private Property

Private property in urban areas is theoretically guaranteed, but due to the weak rule of law, it cannot be effectively safeguarded. In rural areas, all land is owned by the government, although customary rights to usage are common. The events in 2013/14 severely damaged fundamental property rights, as the government was unable to protect its citizens and their assets during and after the conflict, resulting in the displacement of millions of people. Many returning individuals have found their properties occupied by others and have faced challenges in reclaiming their land, particularly Muslim owners. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) like the Norwegian Refugee Council have implemented programs to assist returnees in advocating for their property rights.

Fiscal stability



Property rights



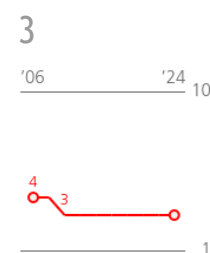
During the period under review, the CAR government has made suggestions and taken initial steps toward the “tokenization” of the economy, including the tokenization of property rights and land ownership. Additionally, the government has expressed plans to introduce a national cryptocurrency called the Sango.

Private enterprise activities have accelerated during the period under review. Diamond exports, which resumed in 2016 after being banned in 2013 because they financed armed groups, supported economic activity in 2018 and 2019. However, the sector suffered a significant blow from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to decreased export demand. The subsequent recovery was further hindered by the interruption of the country’s main transport corridor in 2021 and exacerbated by the rise in fuel and food prices in 2022. Despite efforts by the government to improve infrastructure and enhance physical security in the countryside, private investment and business opportunities have yet to materialize.

Agricultural production, including timber, bamboo, cotton and coffee (which are the CAR’s main agricultural exports), accounts for over 40% of GDP. Recent government investments in the agricultural sector, combined with favorable weather conditions and improved security, have contributed to stabilizing the fragile economy amidst turbulent macro conditions and multiple crises.

In contrast to previous review periods, where the mere presence of an elected government helped unlock donor funding, despite the precarious security situation, in this review period there has been a reversal. While the security situation improved throughout 2021 and 2022, donors have become more hesitant to provide funding due to growing geopolitical spillovers (with Western donor countries redirecting resources to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia). Additionally, the business environment remains risky, and both state and economic institutions are fragile. Chinese companies have been the main investors, primarily offering construction services. However, Russian investments since 2019, mainly in the mining sector under local legal status, have raised concerns regarding their connection to security-related agreements with the CAR government. The shadow economy remains significantly more profitable than the formal private sector for local actors. Compared to some neighboring countries, the government faces challenges in attracting private companies.

Private enterprise



10 | Welfare Regime

Given the limited tax base of the state (less than 9% of GDP), there are minimal financial resources available to build and develop widespread social safety nets. Improvements in territorial control and progress in containing armed groups since 2021 have improved conditions for NGOs’ work and revitalized community self-help as a traditional form of social support in rural areas. However, formal and informal self-help mechanisms were destroyed during the 2013 crisis and remain weak in the CAR, due to the lack of social capital within and between social groups. Church organizations currently serve as the strongest social safety net in rural regions, providing care for the elderly, education, health care, and promoting entrepreneurial activities.

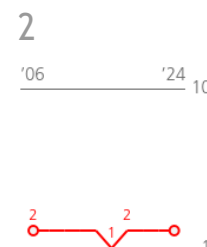
Estimates suggest that, in 2022, more than half of the country’s population, around 3.1 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance. The CAR government and the OCHA have officially launched a \$461.3 million Humanitarian Response Plan for 2022. Rising global food and energy prices exacerbate the hardships of vulnerable groups and displaced persons.

Average life expectancy at birth has steadily increased over the past two decades, reaching 54.02 years in 2022, a 0.63% increase from 53.35 years in 2021 (and up from 50.7 years in 2015 and 44.6 years in 2003). The Touadéra government has made efforts to reduce the country’s high maternal mortality rate, as well as neonatal and child mortality rates. While international donors supported the CAR’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is declining interest in the CAR to receive further vaccine donations through the COVAX Initiative. With just over one hundred COVID-19-related deaths, the CAR has managed to navigate through three main waves of the pandemic relatively unscathed. However, the death toll from malaria quadrupled between 2014 and 2017 and malaria continues to account for 40% of reported illnesses and 10% of all registered deaths. The surge in international funding for the CAR after the 2013 crisis resulted in a proliferation of NGOs on the ground, but there has been no sustained improvement in access to social safety nets.

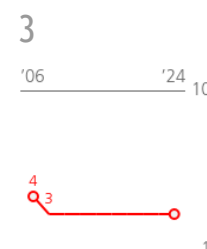
The constitution of the CAR reaffirms the country’s commitment to preventing all forms of discrimination against women, indigenous people and tribal groups. It guarantees equality based on various factors such as race, ethnic origin, region, sex, religion, political affiliation and social position. However, similar to many legal provisions in the CAR, enforcement remains challenging.

In 2021, women constituted 44.8% of the labor force. Data on the gender pay gap are not available. However, due to lower female literacy rates among the working-age population, women face significant disadvantages in the labor market and the overall economy.

Social safety nets



Equal opportunity



According to UNESCO's report in 2020, the adult literacy rate among women was 25.76%, showing a marginal improvement of 1.76 percentage points over the past 10 years. In comparison, the overall literacy rate in the country was 37.4%, with a rate of 49.5% for men in 2018.

The UNDP Gender Inequality Index also places the CAR at the bottom of its list, ranking 166th out of 170 indexed countries, with a score of 0.672 in 2021. This represents a slight improvement from 0.701 in 2016, which coincided with the first elections after the 2013 crisis that brought the Touadéra government into office.

While women accounted for 20% of the Conseil National de Transition (CNT), and a woman served as interim president from 2014 to 2016, the representation of women in the National Assembly elected in 2016 (installed in May 2016) dropped to 8.5%, lower than in Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and Cameroon. The 2021 elections slightly increased the share of women in the National Assembly to 13%.

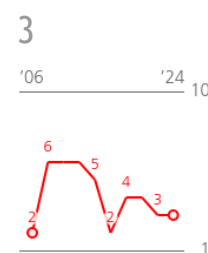
Despite women holding key government positions since 2016, including minister of defense and minister of foreign affairs, only seven out of 39 government ministers were women prior to the 2021 elections. Following the elections, the government cabinet was reduced to 31 ministers and still included seven women.

Discrimination against Muslims remains a prevalent issue, although it may be subtle and not immediately apparent. While there are no legal barriers to Muslims' advancement, their access to various public service positions has been hindered by limited access to basic education, particularly in the northeastern regions. The economic success of Muslim traders has contributed to increased discrimination, which also extends to non-local Muslims, such as Chadians, who are often suspected of exploiting the country's resources. For many decades, first-generation Central Africans with foreign-sounding names would register their children under Christian- or French-sounding names to avoid discrimination at school and work. The example of Michel Djotodia, the former interim president and the first Muslim head of state in the CAR's history, illustrates this situation.

11 | Economic Performance

The civil war in 2013 had a devastating impact on the CAR's economy. GDP contracted by an unprecedented 37% in 2013 to \$1.6 billion. The country's recovery has been hampered by recurrent security crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and external price shocks in the food and energy markets in 2022. By 2021, GDP (current \$) had increased to \$2.52 billion (compared to \$1.95 billion in 2017). Real GDP grew by 1% in 2021, although per capita growth remained negative at -1.0% in 2021 and -0.9% in 2020. The growth estimate for 2022 initially projected an accelerated growth rate of 3.5%. However, due to delays in or withholding of donor contributions, the latest calculations revised the estimate downward to -2.0%. The forecast for 2023 shows a real growth rate of 3.7% and has been revised upward to 5.5%, taking into account the disbursement of delayed donor contributions.

Output strength



The inflation rate was 4.3% in 2021 and estimated to reach 6.0% in 2022.

The future trajectory of economic growth heavily depends on political stability, continued reforms, donor support and improved performance in the forestry and agricultural sectors. The CAR's economy faces risks due to low levels of economic diversification and heavy reliance on foreign aid, which accounts for over 40% of the budget. The country's geographical location, with only one access road, makes it highly vulnerable to external shocks, as demonstrated by events in 2020 and 2021. These risks outweigh the incentives to attract foreign direct investment, which amounted to 1.2% of GDP in 2021 (compared to 1.15% in 2019 and 0.2% in 2015, before the 2013 crisis). The overall public debt reached 47.6% of GDP in 2021 and is projected to increase to 54.8% in 2022, breaking the downward trend observed from over 50% in 2017 to 43.4% in 2020.

The decision to resume legal exports of diamonds from "compliant zones" under the Kimberley Process in July 2016 had a positive effect on government revenues in 2018 and 2019. However, exports were interrupted again in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The upward trend in diamond, unwrought gold, and other mineral exports continued in 2021 and 2022, and is expected to continue in 2023.

Unemployment statistics have been unreliable in the CAR, showing steady rates between 2012 and 2014 (6.6% in 2021, 6.4% in 2020) despite the significant economic contraction during those years.

12 | Sustainability

Environmental performance in the CAR has significantly improved since the Touadéra government took office. In 2016, the Yale Environmental Performance Index ranked the CAR 159th out of 180 countries. The country's rank has improved since, reaching 124th place in 2019 and 75th place in 2022.

Environmental laws are often contradictory and rarely enforced. However, the government has passed a far-reaching revision of the "Code de la Faune," after five years of review. International actors trying to strengthen the legal framework pushed for and paid for it. Biodiversity in the CAR has decreased in recent decades as domestic and foreign poachers have slowly emptied wildlife reserves in the north and east of the country. Only three reserves are still functional, one in the southwest, one in the north and one in the eastern part of the country. All are under siege by armed groups, foreign herders and international poachers. In 2018 and 2019, the Wildlife and Forestry Ministry signed three significant public-private partnerships with three foreign organizations to hand over the long-term management of three parks and their functional territory. The humanitarian crisis remains such that refugees and internally displaced people are unable to have any significant consideration for the environment.

Environmental
policy

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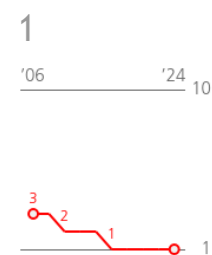


The 1990 forestry law is progressive in its environmental and social protections (e.g., quantitative limits on logging to promote natural regeneration and involving indigenous populations in management). But enforcement is extremely weak, companies often self-regulate and corruption is common. In 2021, over 60% of the value of the country's exported goods came from timber.

The overall 2019 literacy rate of 37.4% has remained largely the same since 2015 (36.8%). Women are clearly discriminated against and only 25.76% of adult women were literate in 2019 (in comparison to 24.4% in 2017). Even though there has been a slight improvement, CAR performs poorly on the U.N. Education Index, with a score of 0.368 in 2021 in comparison to its 2019 score of 0.353. The U.N. Education Index reports that there was a ratio of 83 students per trained teacher in the country in 2019, with a low enrollment ratio of 17% at the secondary school level.

Despite significant support for education from donor partners over the last 20 years (World Bank, IMF, European Commission, African Development Bank and China), a low level of education remains endemic in the CAR, significantly restricting economic growth and stability. The country's education system is not competitive and its quality eroded during the 2013 crisis and has not fully recovered thereafter. The CAR only spent 2.2% of its GDP on education in 2021 (2020: 1.8%). No other quantitative data on research and development in the CAR exists, but qualitative data suggest that only Bangui University holds a minimal capacity for social and scientific research, where quality varies significantly depending on the level of funding and availability of the few national experts now heavily solicited by the humanitarian community and the United Nations.

Education policy /
R&D



Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

There is a high variety of structural constraints in the CAR that severely restrict governance capacity. Landlocked, with only one terrestrial, one aerial and one aquatic transport corridor, the country is surrounded by unstable neighbors that have also been going through crises and conflicts. These include Chad, Sudan's Darfur Province, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Cameroon has struggled for years now with the expansion of Boko Haram into its northern provinces. Chad, itself once torn by conflict, has intervened in different ways in CAR. Along with Sudan, it is a strongly problematic neighbor with its own interests. Under former President Idriss Déby, Chad was very influential in CAR domestic politics and has fed its neighbor's instability with small arms, weapons and soldiers. Frictions remain with the new president, Mahamat Déby, who feels his country's security threatened by the presence and activities of Wagner Group troops in the northwest of the CAR, close to the border. The CAR has also encountered problems with Chad and Sudan related to their livestock-based economies. Neither country has sufficient grazing capacity to feed its cattle and is thus dependent on the grasslands of the CAR to sustain them. This regularly leads to conflicts with local farmers and populations. Structural constraints include extensive surface water networks, which make communication and mobility considerably difficult in many rural areas. There are neither adequate telecommunication nor transport infrastructures in the countryside. Only 1,300 km of roads are paved, although the CAR is roughly the size of France. Twenty thousand kilometers of unpaved roads are subject to annual closure during the rainy season, which usually lasts between four to six months. This challenging geographical context compounds the historical challenges of a traditionally weak state and only limited basic administration. The country remains one of the poorest in the world. On the UNDP's Human Development Index, it ranks 188th out of 189 countries. An estimated 71% of the population lives below the international poverty line.

The role and function of civil society in the CAR has evolved considerably independence. Civil society groups emerged in the 1960s with an initial focus on women's rights, family issues and religion. This changed in the 1990s, when the attempted coups d'état and the 2003 rebellion considerably weakened the state. As a result, civil society groups increasingly acted in the field of human rights violations, poverty and unemployment. The CAR's civil society is mainly composed of community groups, labor unions, charity organizations, organizations close to churches and religious groups. These organizations have often intervened in areas

Structural
constraints

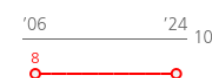
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Civil society
traditions

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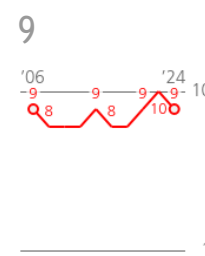


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where the state does not provide sufficient basic services, trying to partly or even fully replace state institutions. Civil society organizations and actors also play a role in national reconciliation. When the government prepared the Bangui Agreements in 2015 with the aim of finding a settlement with major rebel groups, civil society actors were invited to take part as mediators. The government sees the main role of civil society as sensitizing individuals and communities and filling the gap between the central government and the population. A major challenge civil society faces is financing. Indeed, a lot of organizations rely on international funding, which makes them also vulnerable to foreign interests. In order to survive, many groups have to adapt their priorities, put original goals and objectives on the back burner, and focus on areas where most of the international community’s funding goes. After years of conflict, social trust is generally limited.

Since gaining independence in 1960, the Central African Republic has experienced a series of crises and conflicts, violence and instability. Attempted and successful coups d’état have followed one another. The presence of rebels has become a ubiquitous phenomenon in many parts of the country. Since its re-election in December 2020 and during the period under review, President Touadéra has attempted to reconquer territories under rebel control, mainly with the help of mercenaries from the Wagner Group. The level of violence has been considerably high on both sides. The rebel movements and national forces backed by international allies have been accused by several institutions, including the United Nations, of committing serious human rights abuses against civilians. According to the UNHCR, there were 744,000 CAR refugees in November 2022 in neighboring Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo, with smaller numbers in Sudan and South Sudan. In addition, 509,000 people currently live as internally displaced persons.

Conflict intensity

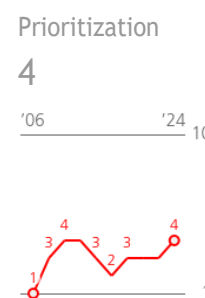


II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

With regard to the volatile security situation and high level of political instability, CAR policymakers in the past have pursued short-term personal gains instead of long-term reforms and strategic priorities. Under President Touadéra and especially over the last few years, a number of changes can however be seen. Touadéra set a number of priorities when he was first elected in 2016 and reaffirmed these in 2022 at the beginning of his second term. There is limited capacity for strategic planning. However, the National Recovery and Peace Plan (PNRCP), initially set up for five years (2017 – 2021) and jointly financed by the European Union, the United Nations

Question Score

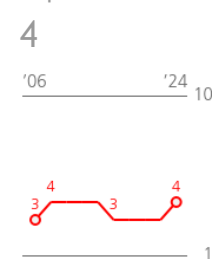


and the World Bank, defines three major strategic goals: One central priority is to reform the national economy, foster a sustainable economic recovery, improve the management of public finances and attract international and local investors. Another aim is to renew the social contract between the state and the population. To improve security and stability, a third priority is to reconquer territories under rebel control and promote reconciliation with armed groups. When the CPC-led rebellion began, following the elections in December 2020, rebel groups controlled two-thirds of the country. Agreements with Rwanda, whose President Paul Kagame visited the CAR in 2019, and with Russia to receive military assistance from both countries, together with support from MINUSCA, have helped the government to take back control of huge parts of the country, in particular of towns and major routes.

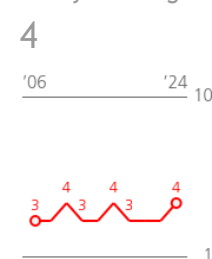
Despite the uniqueness of the level of violence and fragmentation of armed groups during and after the most recent crisis, it seems that the government's ability to set and maintain priorities has mirrored that which existed during previous episodes of violence. The political capacity to adopt a long-term perspective depends on the government's ability to balance competing interests, in particular those of the international community and the opposition, including both political parties and armed groups. Due to the high level of dependency on international partners and donors, the implementation of strategic decisions relies significantly upon foreign aid and commitment. The obstacles to implementing strategic priorities are multiple. A major problem lies in the CAR government's fragmented territorial control. During the period under review, the government was able to restore control in some areas, notably with the help of foreign troops such as the Wagner Group mercenaries. At the same time, the PNRC's priorities are intricately intertwined. Progress with regard to one priority (e.g., economic recovery, social contract) often depends upon achievements in another (e.g., security). A sustainable economic recovery will only be possible once security and stability are restored in the country. Similarly, a renewal of the social contract requires peace and jobs.

The CAR's history of repeated crises, rebellions and conflicts suggest a lack of policy learning, innovation and flexibility. Since its independence, the country has progressed from one conflict to the other. The government's work has often been interrupted by attempted or successful coups or violent conflicts, which have also destroyed administrative infrastructure. Almost every conflict resolution process has resulted in a government reshuffle and administrative changes that have challenged bureaucratic continuity and consistency. While the details of each crisis period are different, the overall trends are comparable, including: the weakness, inability or unwillingness of governments to respect democratic processes and work with the opposition, unsatisfactorily implemented reforms, failed demobilization, disassociation, reintegration and reconciliation programs, and a lack of orientation in economic development. Monitoring and evaluating past experiences is extremely difficult in the CAR as statistics on which to base policy decisions are either not available or not reliable. However, there are also multiple ministries, where technical

Implementation



Policy learning



expertise and reforms are appreciated. Although this does not represent the core of how governance in the CAR functions, it does show some policy learning willingness.

During the period under review, what mirrors past experiences is Touadéra's reluctance to actively engage in dialogue with rebel movements, as his exclusion of CPC representatives from the republic-wide dialogue demonstrates.

At the same time, a substantial break with past policy is the president's determination to change allies and openly break with the former colonial power, France. China and Russia are emerging as new partners, with an increase in bilateral political, trade and economic cooperation. The decades-long special relationship between Paris and Bangui seems to have come to an end. This development is new, but nevertheless mirrors the situation in other former French colonies, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, which have also been seeking new international partnerships. It remains unclear whether this change in orientation can be considered policy learning.

15 | Resource Efficiency

The CAR has been struggling since its independence to use available resources efficiently. This is not only due to the state's fragmented control of its territory, but also to the ineffectiveness of the public administration and taxation system. Working for public services is lucrative, given that international partners such as France, the European Union, the World Bank and the IMF have repeatedly provided direct financial support of public sector wages in spite of poor management performance. This has led to a number of problems, including appointments that are largely meritless, clientelism, delayed retirements, duplications and overlaps among available jobs. Consequently, the administration is characterized by the inefficient use of human resources. Organizations are repeatedly reshuffled and decentralized across the country. The quality of human resources has steadily decreased as a long-term effect of the violence in the country. The country has the lowest domestic tax revenues in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the FMI, it only reached CFAF 125.9 billion, which corresponds to 8.8% of GDP. As a result, the CAR has been heavily dependent upon external financing for basic state administration. However, inflows of aid are volatile and leave the country vulnerable to the international community's goodwill. This is particularly evident now, as traditional partners, such as the IMF, have frozen or delayed financial support, demanding more information about expenditures.

President Touadéra seems determined to improve the national administration's efficiency – more than any previous administration. Progress is slow, mainly due to the fact that the government's top priority remains security. However, during the review period, the government has made efforts, in particular, to digitalize services. The aim is not only to lay the foundations for digital governance, which would, for



instance, ease salary payments to public employees in remote areas of the country. It is also to digitalize the tax administration in order to increase transparency and efficiency.

The CAR government struggles to balance trade-offs between different policy goals. This is particularly the case in their attempts to balance donor financed policy goals against domestically financed goals (which however is often because of unrealistic plans by international donors). The PNRCP has laid out a new “partnership for mutual accountability” to ensure effective implementation of the plan. Its “architecture” follows standard international norms of coherent policy implementation: coordination and dialogue mechanisms, financial instruments and monitoring, and evaluation. However, the PNRCP has explicitly emphasized that this

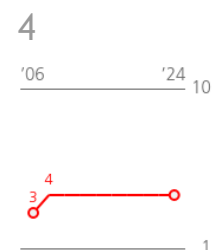
architecture will be used only for the achievement of the plan’s targets, not for putting in place an adequate institutional framework. This is a classic failure of coherent policy coordination; coordination of donor financed programs is separate from overall coordination of the state apparatus. This lack of coherent horizontal national policy coordination guarantees at best conflict, redundant policy objectives and confusion, and at worst increased negligence, corruption, concessionary politics and discontent among all stakeholders (e.g., opposition, international community and government).

CAR governments have only partially been willing and able to contain corruption. Limited political will, few resources and continued insecurity hinder the government from effectively combating administrative corruption as well as economic corruption, including illicit trafficking of diamonds, gold and ivory. The few integrity

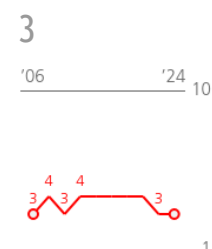
mechanisms that exist focus on preventing misuse of external funding. Audits, media access to information, accountability of officeholders and transparent procurement mechanisms are directly encouraged by grants or indirectly by government departments that benefit from anti-corruption policy grants. The same anti-corruption mechanisms are irregularly applied to domestic revenues, which condones a lack of transparency in domestic policy goals and preserves the political space for concessionary politics. Anti-corruption institutions have appeared and disappeared from the institutional framework over time but have

primarily served as an alibi for illicit government activity. Similarly, anti-corruption policies and programs exist on paper. As noted above, President Touadéra has established the High Authority for Good Governance (HAGG), which is also responsible for introducing equity and transparency into resource allocation. However, the HAGG is not authorized to proceed with investigations without prior authorization from the president and the prime minister. The HAGG thus has done very little, especially with regard to persistent weaknesses in the judicial system.

Policy coordination



Anti-corruption policy



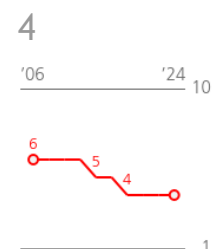
16 | Consensus-Building

Since independence, with the exception of the Bokassa period from 1965 to 1979, major political actors have agreed that strengthening democracy in the CAR should be a long-term goal. Even rebel groups and militias consistently pay lip service to democracy, rule of law and civil liberties, and desire inclusion in CAR’s democratic political establishment. However, once inclusion in the CAR’s democratic system has been achieved, democratic ideals have traditionally come second to personal enrichment. The CAR’s democratic institutions act as a means of personal enrichment, rather than primarily as a means of creating democracy. Furthermore, if all major actors agree on democracy, they seem to disagree on how to achieve it. Whereas some minority groups (e.g., Muslims, women) favor numerical representation in government and public administration as a way of building consensus and achieving representation, other groups oppose this view.

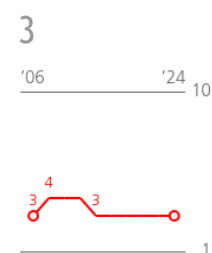
Similarly, on paper, consensus on a market economy as a strategic, long-term goal is evident. Political actors in the CAR agree that economic decisions, and the pricing of goods and services should be guided solely by the aggregate interactions of the country’s individual citizens and businesses with little government intervention or central planning. However, in practice, the formal economy suffers from flagrant distortions caused by corruption, trafficking, the absence of the rule of law and a deep seated “cadeau” mentality. The formal economy is also dwarfed by the informal economy, which exists in all sectors and regions of the country and does not have a place in strategic decision-making.

In the CAR, it is difficult to draw a clear line between democratic and anti-democratic actors. Democracy should come from the population itself, less, not from the elites. Some presidents were former rebels and came to power by a coup d’état. Once in power, they, however, adhered to democratic values and practices, kept to the constitution and held elections – even if the polls often failed with regard to many basic democratic standards. In return, political actors who do not succeed in achieving a lucrative government position often taking revenge by siding with armed groups in opposition to the government, subsequently manipulating segments of the population to take stances against the government or certain international actors. At the same time, in their desire to induce reform, political actors, who at least consider themselves democratic, are also likely to resort to anti-democratic practices in order to realize their plans. During the review period, the clearest example was the dismissal of the president of the Constitutional Court, Daniele Darlan, after the court rejected President Touadéra’s proposal to change the constitution to allow him to run for a third term. The court considered this reform unconstitutional.

Consensus on goals



Anti-democratic actors



In the CAR, the long series of crises and the protracted violence in recent years is in part the result of the political leadership's inability to moderate the capacity for violence in rural areas and defuse intense, established frustrations. Violence is deeply rooted in the country's history and has consistently served as the best means for political elites to access entitlements and natural resources. In particular, Central Africans from the north of the country, many of whom are Muslim, have consistently expressed their frustration over perceived injustices (e.g., discrimination in accessing education, employment and other basic services in the northeastern part of the country). Neither the international community nor the political leadership were able to address these frustrations. The northerners' extensive subregional networks and control over significant resources gave them a strong platform to overthrow the country's leadership. Conflict management happens mostly on the local level in communities, especially when their conditions are generally peaceful.

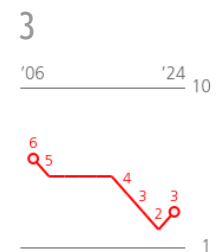
Strong civil society actors and organizations have never existed in the Central African Republic. Whereas governments have often invited civil society to participate in policy deliberation, formulation and decision-making, this has mainly been symbolic and not gone beyond simple tokenism. The most recent example is the March 2022 republic-wide dialogue, to which civil society representatives were invited together with political opposition parties. To some extent, involving civil society groups was undertaken to satisfy the demands of international observers and meet donors' requirements. In return, the creation of a civil society organization has developed into yet another means of rent-seeking. It should be noted that some civil society groups also exacerbate cleavage-based conflicts and undermine CAR's democratic processes to put pressure on the government. In the absence of a clearly identified mechanism of cooperation between the state and civil society, relationships between most civil society organizations and the government are either nonexistent or conflict-laden.

Regarding justice, the prosecution of perpetrators of past injustices has been slow and inadequate, and often targets only a handful of elite suspects. The Special Criminal Court (SCC), mentioned above, was established in 2015 to enable the investigation of crimes against humanity and deliver justice to victims of crimes committed since 2015. Parliament renewed the SCC's mandate for another five years in December 2022.

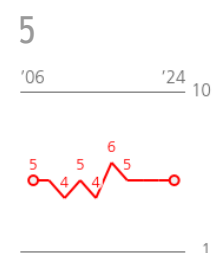
The CAR government collaborates with the International Criminal Court (ICC). In 2021, the CAR government handed over an alleged rebel group leader to the ICC to face accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Two previous arrests were made in 2018. Even though the SCC has made some progress, judiciary processes remain slow.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that political actors often switch between being part of the government and the opposition and joining or even leading rebel movements, and therefore know each well. François Bozizé, for instance, came

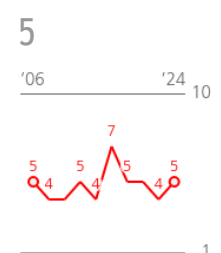
Cleavage / conflict management



Public consultation



Reconciliation



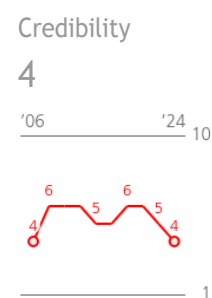
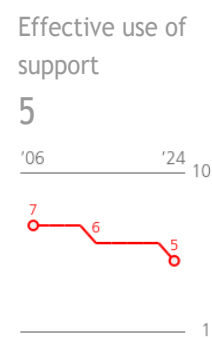
to power through a coup d'état and was put down by the 2013 rebellion. President Touadéra served under Bozizé as prime minister between 2008 and 2013. In 2019, ousted President Bozizé returned to the CAR, despite an outstanding warrant for his arrest, and was allowed by President Touadéra to live in the CAR without being arrested.

17 | International Cooperation

The CAR government has always been dependent on international aid. Foreign support has been essential to making any progress with regard to the national goals jointly set by the political leadership and international donors. These goals include reducing conflict, increasing growth and enhancing government revenues (not least from natural resources), administrative capacity in various sectors and national infrastructure. The Five Year National Recovery and Peace Plan (PNRCP) President Touadéra launched in 2016 was very explicit with regard to steps in reaching its goals, and clearly spells out the resources required to take these steps. However, the effectiveness of external aid contributions to the country's development has always been questionable. Generally, international aid has only partially and temporarily been able to address fundamental obstacles to development (e.g., security, lack of basic services, transport and communication infrastructure). This is partly due to government failures, but also to international partners' short-term interests and lack of efficient oversight mechanisms. The recent shift in international partnerships, the break with France and turning toward Russia, introduces a clear question mark into the development trend.

Since Touadéra's government has increased cooperation with Russia and called upon the support of the Wagner Group, relations with traditional partners, above all France, have significantly deteriorated. France cut its budgetary aid in June 2021, accusing Russia of creating anti-French propaganda and the CAR government of promoting it. Diplomatic tensions further escalated in November 2022, when Bangui denied the French ambassador the privileged position French diplomats had enjoyed to date as deans of the diplomatic corps, under the so-called principle of *décanat*. The close ties with Russia have also overshadowed the relations between Bangui and the IMF and World Bank, as well as with the European Commission.

On paper, the CAR has ratified or concluded 186 different international conventions, charters and treaties, including the various Geneva conventions, U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, ILO core labor standards, various arms control treaties and transparency initiatives in the natural resource sector. However, as with its own laws, enforcement is extremely challenging. Ratification of the conventions often serves more as a way to leverage international funds for compliance than proof of a fundamental belief in a convention's goals. Given the cyclical nature of conflicts in the CAR, each new administration initially presents itself as credible as a means

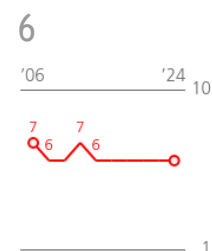


of achieving power. However, in the eyes of the Western international community, the new direction in Touadéra's international politics challenges the CAR's credibility.

The CAR is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). However, similar to other African regions, these economic communities remain insignificant when it comes to promoting intra-regional trade. Trade and exchanges among Central African states is significantly low. This is related to a number of factors, including high trading costs, complex border procedures that complicate trade relationships rather than facilitating them, bad infrastructure, and roads that cannot be used all year round, as well as a lack of diversification and low trade complementarity.

Its neighbors have intensively influenced the CAR's security. On the one hand, neighbors, such as Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have consistently exported their conflicts and instability into the CAR. Fluid, porous borders, which are insufficiently monitored, have led to the uncontrolled entry of small arms and armed combatants to the CAR. On the other hand, countries from the region have regularly tried to influence and shape the country's politics. Most prominently, Chad has exerted massive influence on developments in the CAR, for example, by supporting François Bozizé's coup in 2003. The CEMAC and the ECCAS have both sent regional troops to the CAR in response to increasing instability and the growing unwillingness of the former colonial power, France, to send its own soldiers. Regional powers, first and foremost Chad's political elite, have used these military operations to pursue their own interests in the CAR. Beginning in 2019, the CAR established a strong relationship with a new ally in the region, Rwanda. Since MINUSCA's deployment in the CAR in 2014, Rwanda has maintained peacekeepers in the country. It is currently the CAR's number one military contributor, with a contingent of 1,698 out of some 11,000 troops in total. In addition, Rwanda and the CAR signed several partnership agreements in 2019. In December 2020, Rwanda sent additional troops to CAR to help block the rebels' march on Bangui.

Regional cooperation



Strategic Outlook

The Central African Republic (CAR) currently faces a range of significant challenges. It remains to be seen how President Faustin-Archange Touadéra will address these challenges during his second term. The country is at a critical juncture from multiple perspectives.

The year 2021 began with a new escalation of violence, as the CPC coalition of armed groups launched a rebellion following the December 2020 elections. While this revolt had the potential to plunge the fragile, vulnerable country into another severe crisis, the government's counter-attack with foreign support proved successful.

The CAR's shift toward new international allies, particularly Russia and China, is significantly altering its international relations. Russia is viewed as a partner interested in mutually beneficial cooperation, while France is seen as a potential disruptive force that has actively influenced the country's domestic politics. Many Central Africans hailed Russian mercenaries as liberators following their assistance in reclaiming vast swaths of territory from rebels. By favoring Russian assistance over Western support, the CAR aligns with a geopolitical trend already underway in other former French colonies, such as Mali and Burkina Faso. However, countries heavily reliant on foreign aid and support, like the CAR, risk losing credibility in the eyes of traditional Western partners, while being dependent on their new partnerships.

Another challenge facing Touadéra's government is the need for a robust national dialogue. Efforts are required from both the government and rebel groups to implement the Luanda Roadmap. A key aspect of this entails engaging armed groups to ensure the effectiveness of the cease-fire and a cessation of violence.

Structural reforms are also crucial to transforming the national economy, reducing its dependence on foreign aid and the export of a limited range of raw materials. This requires sustainable, private-sector-led, and inclusive economic growth. However, the CAR is still weakened by the 2013 crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a substantial decrease in exports and demand for its commodities. Additionally, the current global economic crisis has resulted in a significant increase in fuel prices, affecting the entire population, from consumers to producers. Economic recovery is intrinsically linked to a stable security environment.

Although the security situation has improved significantly following the repulsion of the CPC, it remains fragile.

Enhancing cooperation at the regional level could greatly benefit the CAR. Poor infrastructure, complex border regulations and non-tariff barriers have posed challenges to economic relations with neighboring countries. For a landlocked country like the CAR, cross-border trade is essential to accessing regional and global markets.

Ultimately, the country's stability will depend heavily on the government's ability to restore and strengthen its social contract. Years of prolonged conflicts and crises have resulted in deep-rooted grievances and limited confidence in the government among the population. Addressing these grievances and tackling the root causes of violence and rebellion, such as poverty, economic inequality and inadequate basic services, is a significant challenge.