



# Taming the Beast: Conflict Recurrence in the Democratic Republic of Congo Towards Containment and Peacebuilding

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## Abstract

*The study challenges the prevailing belief that conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is mainly driven by ethnicity, weak governance, or resource mismanagement. It argues instead that recurring violence stems from deeper structural problems, such as economic deprivation, systemic institutional failure, and the influence of multifaceted geopolitical interests. Despite repeated peace agreements and interventions, the root causes remain unaddressed, allowing tensions to resurface quickly. Using qualitative research based on secondary data from government reports, international organisations, and expert academic studies, the findings show that conflict in the DRC is phenomenally complex in nature and raises persistent questions about why the DRC has not benefited from its sizable economic potential. This study calls for developing strategies related to inclusive economic development policies to provide an institutional framework, restoring operationalisation of these institutional challenges. It refrains from straightforward explanations relating to ethnicity or mismanagement of resources. It aims to inform policy recommendations about future interventions by underpinning the path to sustained peace and national development in similarly complex contexts.*

**Keywords:** Conflict; DRC; recurrence; containment; policy consideration

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## Introduction

In the past three decades, the African continent witnessed notable economic growth and political stability following the ending of conflicts in several countries and the firming of democratic practice (UNGA, 1998; Kelly, 2023). However, volatility continues to be a severe challenge in some regions, such as the Great Lakes. Notably, the Democratic Republic of Congo's insecurity significantly limits social and economic development (Chestnut, 2020). This observation was corroborated by the Secretary General of the United Nations, who noted that Africa had started making significant progress economically and politically in recent years. However, in some areas, conflict impeded or threatened progress (UNGA, 1998). It was further reported that in 1996, there were 14/53 armed conflicts afflicted countries

on the African continent. This included the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) under the Kabila administration, which experienced an upheaval that ended Mobutu's 32-year administration in 1997 (UNECA, 2015). The gloomy situation reported in 1998 was positively and dramatically changed. Only six countries (including the DRC) were deeply affected by conflict, while the rest enjoyed relative political stability by then (UNGA, 2004). The DRC remained in crisis the same year, regardless of the peace pact formally ending the war.

Today, the country is still facing persistent insecurity challenges and smarting from the effects of the continental wars and World War II (Roberts & Muganda, 2008; Coghlan et al., 2004; Prunier, 2009). In 2013, the DRC was reported to be among three African countries experiencing setbacks related



to conflict, resolution, and stability, which have remained a prominent feature in the history of the Congolese people (UNGA, 2013). There are key peace agreements that were signed, subsuming the peace deal made in July 2002 between Rwanda and the DRC exhorting the Rwandan troops to pull out of the DRC and demilitarisation of the Hutu paramilitaries operating in the eastern DRC; the July 1999 six-country armistice signed in Lusaka; the 2008 agreement between the rebel groups and the DRC government; and the more recent seven nation November 2022 arrangement for a cessation of hostilities (Kelly, 2023). Some of these truces restored peace and paved the way for post-conflict transition, including elections in 2006 and 2011 (Kelly, 2023). Figure 1 below shows people fleeing the ravaging war in the DRC. The failure to strengthen peace in light of several ceasefire

agreements is indicative of deep-seated, unresolved problems that fuel ongoing antagonism amongst the disputants, mistrust by communities and the people regarding the state, and bad relationships between the DRC and its neighbouring countries (Abunemeh, 2019). In any case, most of these issues date back to the colonial epoch, which created a state-tolerated national resources exploitation for rulers' benefit and was inherited by the post-independence systems (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; UNECA, 2015; Kisangani, 2012). Hence, the DRC wars have been linked to poorly planned natural resource distribution. This has become a competitive arena for locals, non-state actors, and foreign states seeking to exploit the insecurity and lack of regulation (Collier & Hoeffler, 2012). Given this setting, it is essential to deepen understanding through investigative study and



debate the DRC conflicts and implications on development for the region and the country. This analytical study will perhaps help to have a more informed formulation of policies at various levels. Hopefully, this study will contribute to this agenda of generating knowledge for input into the discourse on DRC strategies for a workable solution to the conflicts and accelerate socio-economic development in the region.

Indeed, a considerable body of research exists on the recurrence and persistence of conflict in the DRC. Most of the studies contend that there are many dimensions to the causes of the conflict, emphasising that we need to look at it as a complex phenomenon arising from historical, political, economic, and social factors. Some of the key arguments focus on ethnic tension, the influence of neighbouring states (especially Rwanda

and Uganda), competition for natural resources, a lack of state capacity and legitimacy, and the proliferation of armed groups. For instance, Ojewale (2025) and Geenen (2025) point out that while minerals and other forms of resource extraction are important, the simplification of the conflict to only the "resource curse" can diminish our understanding of the conflict. Ethnic tensions, land disputes, and exclusion from politics are arguably just as important, and the framing around "conflict minerals" shifted attention more profound structural and political questions around the unfolding conflict. Other research emphasises the cyclical nature of violence in the eastern DRC, which has persisted, despite peace accords and international interventions. These measures



have failed largely due to previously persistent structural grievances and the weakness of former state institutions.

Some research focused on the recurring insurgencies and the illegal trade of minerals (Mafura, 2021) acknowledges contributing factors like social exclusion and conflict entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, others (Maeresera et al., 2018) have highlighted the lack of coordination of actors and the failures of national and international peace attempts to address the root causes, specifically, governance and the weakness of institutions.

The paper is very much in agreement with the general agreement in the literature that the DRC's contemporary conflict is rooted in factors such as competition over resource control, issues of ethnicity/region, and the general weakness of governance. However, I am equally in agreement with newer

scholarship, and indeed, the argument of the paper attached cautions against simplifying the conflict by identifying one factor of the many. The evidence reviewed supports a more complex-structural analysis and consideration of issues of historical legacies, failure of institutions, and the need to consider inclusive and locally based solutions.

All the above relate to many of the following issues: first, the colonial legacy is viewed as a primary reason, with historical tensions exacerbated by the artificial borders established by European powers, which grouped numerous ethnic groups. Second, as armed groups vie for dominance, conflicts are exacerbated by exploiting natural resources, especially the DRC's enormous mineral richness, including diamonds, gold, and coltan. Thirdly, conflict is still fueled by ethnic conflicts, which

are partially the result of colonial "divide and rule" strategies. It is also said that weak institutions and poor governance make it more difficult for the government to deliver security and other necessities. The conflicts have been drawn out and made more complex by regional issues, such as the participation of

cross-border armed organisations and neighbouring nations. Finally, economic issues, including unemployment, poverty, and unfair resource distribution, have made the environment conducive to violence.

**Figure 1. Event of 2023 (people fleeing the March 23 (M23) movement rebel group in Bambu North Kivu, eastern DRC)**



*Source: World-Report, 2024*



## Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that describes conflict in the DRC builds upon conflict theory and its structuralist extension. Conflict theory assumes that there is a perpetual struggle and conflict in society over limited resources, with class conflict, economic forces, and power relations being central concepts, such as fighting for the mineral wealth of the DRC and power over the DRC. The social and economic contradictions often overlap with ethnic and identity grievances. Access and control over resources typically have an ethnic basis, making access and control issues more salient in this multi-dimensional contest over land and power. Going further, human needs and identity theories lend greater insight into the psychological and social basis for the violence.

In this study, structural conflict theory focuses on systemic variables, like deprivation, inequality, and institutional failure, that act as root causes of conflict. In previous studies of the DRC, most of the research has concentrated on external interference, oversights/mismanagement of resources, ethnic conflict, or all of those. This structuralist framework also makes it easier to understand how problematic institutions and social structures create an environment for deep-seated conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2012). Ethnic divisions, which have historically been used in colonial “divide and conquer” strategies, are better understood as aspects of political mobilisation, but not necessarily the cause (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002; Lemarchand, 2009a). Weak states, weak state institutions, and exclusionary governance create social and political



power vacuums filled by armed actors, external interventions, and ongoing regional and international involvement.

The structuralist approach is the best way to analyse the DRC's conflict because it creates a more holistic structural analysis that considers historical, economic, political, and social forces and their interaction in producing, reproducing, and perpetuating cycles of violence and mistrust. In contrast, narrative approaches focusing on ethnicity, resource greed, or exploitation do not solve the problems underpinning the conflict and do not consider the broad scope of incompetence causing the conflict. Structuralism identifies structural issues—notable economic deprivation, exclusionary politics, poor and weak institutions, etc.—that ultimately causes the conflict.

The ability to recommend and implement long-term profound structural change, involving restructuring institutions and inclusive policies, will remove the short-term responses to conflict. Existing and historical evidence shows a variety of peace agreements to stop fighting, or the variety of resource-based agreements between the DRC and foreign countries, is based on the belief that bringing in short-term agenda-based solutions without fixing the problems the other side causes is a poor response to attempting to reach a sustainable long-term solution. Building on an understanding of structural conflict theory helps identify how societies are organised. The issues of exclusion, injustice, inequality, inequity, deprivation, marginalisation, and exploitation arise for young and white leaders like Kabila and Mobutu against their respective moral and evidence-based public opinion





(Jones, 2003; Oakland, 2005; UKEssays, 2017; Braeckman, 1999). The DRC has considerable social inequality and gender discrepancies with a robust sexual violence backdrop of female denial of rights to exploit warfare as a strategy for social instability (Kelly, 2023).

## Literature review

Current analyses of the crisis in the DRC present a nuanced, multi-faceted understanding of the interlocking historical, political, economic, and social drivers of ongoing conflicts. This comprehensive approach embeds contemporary violence in a broader regional and historical context. However, some of the literature tends to emphasise external actors and underplay the role of internal actors. At the same time, an overemphasis on natural resources can obscure other critical issues such as political representation and land

rights. The literature review draws on themes of the geography of the DRC, the DRC economy, the root causes of conflict, ideology, post-independence state building, contestation over resources, ethnicity, the management of the public sector, and institutional design.

## The country's geography and economy

The DRC is the second-largest country in Africa by area (UNECA, 2015). Nevertheless, for its size, the DRC has a low population density, with the population being approximately 28 persons per square kilometre. Extensive, fertile forest cover due to its equatorial position (Loffman, 2017) given these geographical features, and coupled with a very harsh, humid climate,



transportation internal to the DRC is integral to its functionality, yet another hindrance (Al-Makura, 2021).

## **More recent developments in the DRC**

Félix Tshisekedi, the opposition leader, won the controversial December 2018 elections and took office officially in January 2019. It was a momentous occasion, representing the first peaceful power transition after Joseph Kabila completed his lengthy stay as president in DRC (Bearth, 2019; CPA, 2023). However, the election's legitimacy was questioned amid claims of electoral irregularities and evidence that Martin Fayulu could have won the election in reality (Pilling, 2019). Tshisekedi's presidency commenced amid continuing crises—a long-lasting

violent conflict in eastern parts of the DRC and an Ebola virus disease outbreak (Ismail, 2019; CPA, 2023).

Tensions with Rwanda surfaced again in 2022, when both governments claimed that one supported rebel groups, including M23 and Hutu militias, and both governments admitted to illicit mining interests (ACSS, 2022; CPA, 2023; PS, 2023). Efforts for diplomatic peace remained largely unsuccessful (AFP, 2022), as M23 and the ADF (an affiliate of ISIS) continued to carry out attacks (AFP, 2023; Kabumba, 2023). The DRC remains wary of relations with its neighbours, notably Uganda and Burundi (Hoinathy, 2023). By 2023, an estimated 5.7 million registered internally displaced people had unmet humanitarian needs (Lorgerie, 2023; UNHCR, 2024). President Tshisekedi has decried missed opportunities by calling on the EU for



assistance and has threatened to postpone elections. At the same time, SADC agreed to send peacekeepers to eastern DRC (Kavanagh, 2023a, 2023b).

## **The leading causes of conflict**

Since the 1960s, conflicts in the DRC have continued in contexts rooted in challenges transitioning from colonialism to independence (Kisangani, 2012; UNECA, 2015). The initial post-colonial discontent resulted from political disagreements, ethnic and regional competition, and debates on establishing a centralised or federal system for governance (Young & Turner, 1985; Lemarchand, 2009b) Ndikumana & Kisangani, 2005). The instability was further complicated by the fact that former colonial powers were reluctant to relinquish control, and by the Western interests in the DRC, as Western powers

used the DRC to undercut the expansion of communism on the African continent. Today, conflicts manifest unresolved historical issues (WB, 2019) as the structural underpinnings for instability were never fully resolved. Even during some periods of relative peace in the 1970s and 1980s under Mobutu, the government sought to establish stability through suppression rather than reconciliation and institutional reform (Malu, 2019).

## **Ideological hostility**

Ideological disagreements were the primary sources of conflict among elites after independence (Weiss, 2000). Patrice Lumumba wanted complete ideological independence from the West, especially the former colonisers (Ndikumana & Kisangani, 2005). Others, like Moise Tshombe, wanted to maintain the strong



patrimonial ties with the Belgian community and the West (Kisangani, 2012). The second ideological disagreement concerned those opposed to Lumumba's support for socialism and those like Tshombe who were pro-capitalism (Weiss, 2000). This ideological hatred is argued to have influenced the 1964–1966 Eastern rebellion, where Laurent Kabila was a leading player and then again later, as the leader of the anti-Mobutu rebellion of 1996 (Weiss, 2000; Kisangani, 2012; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). This ideological struggle was significant for Lumumba's assassination and Mobutu's eventual assumption of power. These events fundamentally changed the DRC by fostering ethnic and regional hatred and legitimised prolonged kleptocratic, autocratic, and despotic rule (UNECA, 2015).

## Control of natural resources disputes

The natural resources in the DRC have reportedly not been distributed evenly to benefit the whole nation. Katanga produces 70 per cent of cobalt and copper in the country, while just after independence, 75 per cent was produced and 20 per cent of public expenses (UNECA, 2015). Likewise, the region of Kasai, dubbed the 'diamond state,' has massive industrial diamonds and gem reserves. The Kivu, which lies in the eastern DRC, has large deposits of coltan, tin, and gold (Kisangani, 2014). Soon after independence, the political leaders from these mineral-rich regions sought secession, citing disgruntlement over how the central government managed resources (Kisangani, 2014; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). The Katanga region became the first to engage in a war of secession in the period 1960–1963; in 1977,

it was Shaba 1, and in Shaba II, the secession war broke out in 1978; the Kasaï war of secession was waged in the period 1960–1962, and the rebellion by the eastern DRC witnessed from 1964–1966 (Kisangani, 2014). Figure 2 below shows soldiers and rebels in eastern DRC.

## Conflict due to ethnic dimensions

According to the World-Bank (2024), the DRC has more than 250 ethnic groups and with over 240 languages spoken. Just after independence, ethnicity triggered conflicts as much as it remains vital to present-day conflicts, as each ethnic group

**Figure 2. Conflict in eastern DRC-East African regional force soldier and M23 rebels (December, 2022)**



Source: Mukoni (2022) on Getty Images. Available at <https://www.dw.com/en/conflict-in-eastern-dr-congo-flares-again/a-67203737>



sought to dominate over others (UNECA, 2015; Young & Turner, 1985). Only the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), led by Lumumba, advocated for national unity transcending ethnic ties (Young & Turner, 1985; Kisangani, 2012; Lemarchand, 2009a). The rest of the other parties were attached to ethnicity and openly defended their preferred interests against what they believed was a threat from foreigners.

## Conflicts and public sector management

The danger of conflict has increased in many ways due to weak public sector management systems (Roberts & Muganda, 2008). This undermined the government's potential to create a coherent and robust system of security that would defend the state's interests locally and internationally (Young & Turner, 1985; Kisangani, 2012). Because the military was

demoralised, under-equipped and underfunded, Mobutu could not mount any intense fight against the 1996 rebellion led by Kabila. Nevertheless, Mobutu deliberately weakened the army as a ploy to avert internal challenges to his reign, which had a boomerang effect (Roberts & Muganda, 2008; UNECA, 2015). The government's ineptitude to effectively implement public sector policies and provide social services and infrastructure weakened the central government's legitimacy, prompting the emergence of opposition activism (Roberts & Muganda, 2008). The opposition leaders were infuriated by the unidirectional resource transfer from provinces to the central government for the benefit of a few, coupled with fiscal disintegration.



## Discussion of main findings

The paper offers substantial evidence of the complex and persistent nature of conflict in the DRC, shaped by historical, political, economic, and social factors (CPA, 2023; World-Bank, 2024). The DRC has over 7.3 million internally displaced persons, with about 120 militias and armed groups operating in the eastern provinces. Between January 2023 and March 2024, at least 1,533 civilians were

killed, 469 were injured, and 712 were abducted in Ituri province alone. Cumulatively, the conflict has claimed nearly 6 million lives since 1998. Displacement reached a record high in early 2024, with 2,741,000 people uprooted in six months; over 2 million were displaced by the M23 movement, accounting for 73% of all cases. Additional displacements in 2024 were caused by M23 movement, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and CODECO. This is summarised in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3. Illustration of key conflict-related statistics in the DRC from 1998 to 2024**



*Source: processed by the author*

Since the 1990s, the DRC has faced ongoing instability, despite its resource wealth and population rank as the fourth

largest in Africa and the highest among francophone countries (CPA, 2023; World-Bank, 2024). Eastern DRC continues to be





an epicentre of ethnic conflict and violent competition for resources, involving state, UN, and non-state actors. The First Congo War (1996–1997) was triggered by spillover from the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, which sent close to two million Hutu refugees into South and North Kivu; some of these, fearing retribution, formed militias in the DRC. Tutsi militias, with foreign involvement, mobilised against the Hutus, escalating regional violence and deepening the conflict.

Rwanda justified its invasion of Zaire by claiming that Hutu groups in eastern DRC threatened Tutsis' security, alleging that Mobutu's government sheltered these extremists. Rwanda, supported by Uganda, Burundi, and Angola due to their security concerns, allied with opposition leader Laurent Kabila against Mobutu's regime. The conflict saw brutal tactics resulting in

thousands of deaths among Hutu militants, government forces, refugees, and civilians in Kivu (Parens, 2022). The Kabila-Kagame alliance succeeded in the 1997 First Congo War, forcing Mobutu to flee; Kabila became president and renamed Zaire the DRC.

However, tensions quickly rose, leading to the Second Congo War in 1998 after Kabila distanced himself from Rwanda, removed Tutsis from his administration, and sought to reduce Rwandan influence in eastern DRC (TRC, 2003). Revelations of war crimes committed by Kagame's forces against the Hutus further damaged Kabila's regime. Kabila demanded that all foreign forces leave, prompting Rwanda to attack again (Zapata, 2011). Angola switched support to Kabila, while Zimbabwe and Namibia joined Kabila's side against other regional forces backed by Rwanda and Uganda.



The conflict persisted until 2001, and, after Laurent Kabila's death, his son ended the war in 2002. Estimates place the Second Congo War's death toll and related humanitarian crisis at over 3 million by 2004 (UNHR, 2002; CPA, 2023).

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the 1997 First Congo War, forcing Mobutu to flee; Kabila became president and renamed Zaire the DRC.

Tensions escalated into the Second Congo War in 1998 after Kabila broke ties with Rwanda, removed Tutsis from his administration, and reduced Rwandan influence in eastern DRC (TRC, 2003). Reports of war crimes by Kagame's forces against the Hutus further weakened Kabila's regime. Kabila ordered all foreign military groups to leave, leading Rwanda to attack again (Zapata, 2011). Angola switched to support Kabila, and Zimbabwe and Namibia allied with him against regional forces backed by Rwanda and Uganda. The conflict lasted until 2001, concluding after Laurent Kabila's death when his son ended the war in 2002. The Second Congo



War and its humanitarian fallout resulted in more than 3 million deaths by 2004 (UNHR, 2002; CPA, 2023).

From 2002 to 2003, DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda had to implement peace agreements for a transitional government led by Joseph Kabila in Kinshasa (USIP, 2002). Despite these agreements, the presence of the UN transformed peacekeeping forces and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but clashes and unrest continued in eastern DRC. Kabila was elected president after a general election in 2006 (DFID, 2006). In the 2000s, the M23 was a conspicuous rebel group that emerged, composed mainly of Tutsi ethnic people (CPA, 2023). From 2012 to 2013, the M23 movement had become a powerful force operating in eastern DRC, and Kinshasa accused Kigali of supporting it. As a countermeasure, in 2013, the UN Security Council created

a task force called the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO, 2022) to reinforce the Congolese troops in fighting against the M23 movement, which was forced to withdraw its original campaign in the same year. However, the evidence that Kigali supported M23 movement had long-lasting effects on the Kinshasa-Kigali political ties (Katombe, 2013). The frosty diplomatic relationships only ended in 2022 (Veira, 2022).

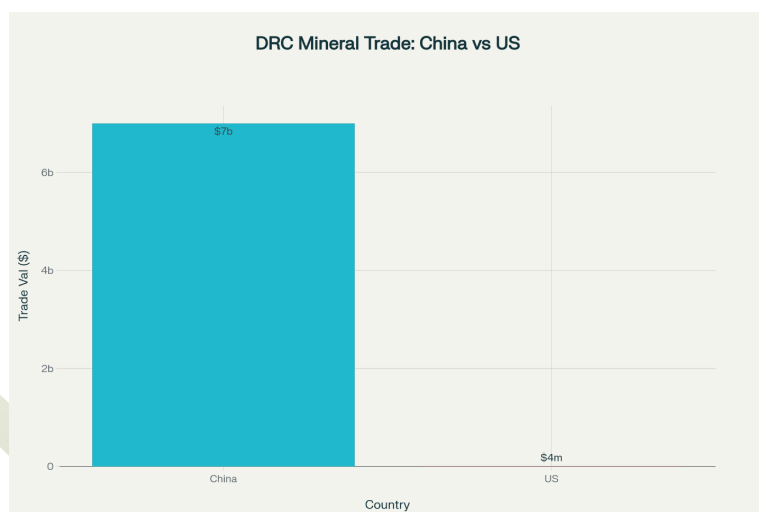
The DRC has extensive reserves of rare minerals and metals comparable to those used to produce high-quality electronic works (ITA, 2022). With the world increasingly becoming more dependent on zinc, copper, cobalt, and other minerals, multinational companies, local armed groups, and foreign actors have been further motivated to engage in the DRC conflict (ITA, 2022). This conflict has been



globalised, especially in eastern DRC (CPA, 2023). Although some companies from the U.S. previously owned big cobalt mines in Congo, several of them were sold to companies in China during the reigns of Donald Trump and Barack Obama (CPA, 2023). Chinese companies linked to Beijing constitute the majority of foreign-owned mines. These mines are primarily for uranium, copper, and cobalt. They are

located in eastern DRC and are guarded by Congolese forces that protect Chinese interests and assets (Bociaga, 2022). This is why Joe Biden's administration recognised the virtual Chinese monopoly in the mining sector as advancing its competitive advantage in the technology and energy industry and an obstacle to the aspirations of the U.S. for clean energy (TWH, 2021). The above is illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Annual mineral trade values between major powers and the DRC**



*Source: processed by the author*



China is implicated in the internal conflict and economy of Congo: the Congolese fight against the M23 insurgents is being assisted by drones from China (AI, 2023), including weaponry, and the government of Uganda procured arms from China to conduct military operations along the borders of the DRC (Katusiime, 2022). The Chinese deals sealed with the Congolese government, mainly when Joseph Kabila was in power, have allowed Chinese companies unparalleled access to metals (Chang, 2022). The relationship between Beijing and Kinshasa was internationally spotlighted until Kabila resigned in 2019. This was when it emerged that Chinese funds meant for infrastructural investment and mining rights settlement were paid directly to Joseph Kabila and his cabal (Hussain, 2022). DRC and China's multi-layered, complex military and economic

relations have occasioned limited access to resources in Congo for other nations and even the Congolese themselves (HRC, 2022). Moreover, in July 2022, a U.S. Congressional Human Rights Commission reported having evidence concerning child labour and unlawful practices in the Congolese mines allegedly owned and run by the Chinese (HRC, 2022). Meanwhile, Russia maintains its relationship with the DRC government. From February 2022, when it attacked Ukraine, Moscow is believed to have courted different African countries for support, and this includes the DRC (NA, 2022). This is even though in February 2023, the DRC voted to support a resolution that condemned the war and demanded Russia withdraw from Ukraine (Tsongo, 2023; NA, 2023). The United States also maintains its trading ties with the DRC. However, strict requirements for reportage on



imports from states affected by conflict are required, and the importation of conflict minerals is banned. These minerals, like gold and tin, are extracted to benefit armed groups from the DRC and its neighbouring states (US-SEC, 2017). Apart from these limitations and the Chinese recent dominance in the mining sector of the DRC, the US interests here are comparatively marginal. For example, the US trades in (IMF, 2023) about four million dollars worth of precious minerals from the DRC annually, compared to over seven billion worth of Congolese minerals imported by China alone (IMF, 2023).

The DRC conflicts reveal a high degree of complexity. The evidence shown in this study indicates three main groups of factors playing a pivotal role, either as primary causes or as secondary causes of conflict. The first group comprises factors

that have to do with bad policies for the economy that hamper economic development. Instead of fully benefiting the Congolese people, the natural resources in the country have been diverted to bankroll the wars, with severe effects on the people and the whole region. Despite having abundant resources, poor economic performance has undermined the capacity of the government to provide essential social services. The government has failed to adequately institute a security system that effectively maintains law and order and guards the porous borders. This has caused economic deprivation and created a fertile ground for rebellions.

The second group of issues consists of systemic institutional ineptitude and bad governance. The government has failed to deliver fundamental services, defend the country's interests at the regional level and



beyond, and create and support vibrant institutions that can contain conflicts. Instead, the state enacted laws and rules undermining the peaceful living together of ethnic groups and, for example, using immigration and national laws to deal with targeted people of Rwandan origin and turning them into stateless people. The state has also been unable to foster an environment for suitable economic regulatory activities. Instead, it promoted a system mired by rent-seeking, kleptocracy, and corruption, thereby alienating people from the state and opening gaps for the uncontrolled resource extraction by foreign and domestic actors.

The third group is composed of geopolitical interests from regional to global echelons (see Figure 5). The recent conflicts arose in a situation characterised by the complicity of private and public mercantilist concerns in a prosperous state with weak

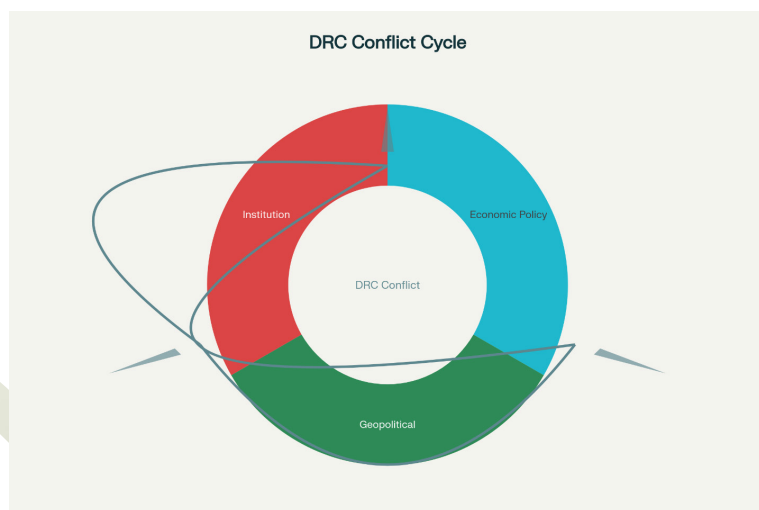
institutions. An environment marked by the reappearance of determinism in global security in the wake of increasing terrorism, while the DRC's relations regionally were compromised by critical cross-border and national security threats. As in the past, the DRC remains precarious because global forces fundamentally compromise its economic and political fate.

To have lasting peace in the DRC, attention should be paid to constructing strategies meant to address issues at the national level, not just to address conflicts. These strategies should include developing a new economic policy framework to address unequal resource distribution. The framework should seek to reduce the separation of the people from the state by improving service delivery and effective management of natural resources to improve employment opportunities and

revenue generation. The DRC must redesign institutional systems that deal with problems concerning state configuration, especially by designing mechanisms for creating a sustainable federal system. This will help resolve nationality and citizenship issues, human security, political and economic rights, and the protection of minority groups. These are

taxing tasks, but appropriate and necessary. Conflict containment and consolidation of political stability call for effective governance institutions that reconcile the relationships between the local communities and the central state, including a perfect arrangement for traditional and local authorities to manage resources such as land.

**Figure 5. Cyclical relationship between the three main factors driving conflict in the DRC**



*Source: processed by the author*





In line with previous research, the study acknowledges the significant contribution that ethnic conflicts and regional dynamics make to violence. It highlights how colonial "divide and rule" tactics have a lasting impact on interethnic relations. The study also emphasises the spillover effects from neighbouring countries, particularly in the wake of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, which is consistent with traditional regional studies of the conflict. The paper firmly backs the claims that institutional failure and poor governance contribute to instability. It

underscores how armed groups and other actors have taken advantage of power voids caused by the Congolese state's incapacity to deliver essential services, security, and efficient government. This supports earlier research on the connection between conflict and state fragility. The study provides new perspectives for examining current advancements and geopolitical aspects (see Figure 6). It draws attention to how the dynamics of conflict are shaped by the changing roles of superpowers, especially China and Russia.



Figure 6. The interconnected leading causes of conflict in the DRC



*Source: processed by the author*

This updates previous studies to reflect current geopolitical circumstances and adds a layer of complexity to the regional focus frequently found in the literature.

## Containment, peacebuilding, and policy analysis

In the DRC, key containment and policy analysis areas include state and institutional building, national dialogue and peacebuilding, economic recovery, and the avoidance



of policy biases. Despite the existence of multiparty politics and regular elections at all levels of government, the state's legitimacy remains fragile, as many local communities feel little connection to the central government. For lasting political stability, federalism and regional autonomy issues must be resolved. The constitution endorses devolution, but the state retains all control over resources. Effective fiscal devolution—paired with safeguards against the misuse of funds—is essential, alongside a careful balance between deconcentration, decentralisation, and the prevention of regional and social imbalances. The state must also construct representative institutions and design inclusionary policies to enable participation for historically

marginalised groups to forge a unified Congolese identity and strengthen the state's territorial cohesion.

Peacebuilding, likewise, demands more than the mere prevention of violence. The DRC must engage in sustained and inclusive dialogue to capture the root causes of conflict, including land rights, ethnicity, political representation, and minority rights. While peacebuilding requires competent internal leadership and strong support from local governments and regional and international partners, its long-term success depends on nationally led initiatives.

Economic recovery is equally vital to stabilisation and post-conflict recovery, particularly by boosting production in conflict-affected zones, allowing us to drive growth and economic development. At the same time, policymakers must avoid



geographic or sectoral bias—neither prioritising urban areas over rural areas nor restricting their focus to eastern DRC; recognising that all parts of the DRC are affected by common structural challenges.

## Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in the DRC is a consequence of a unique and complex interaction between historical, political, economic and social developments. This investigation shows that, after several decades of peace agreements alongside international mediation efforts, the causes of instability were primarily untouched. The findings of the investigation indicate that the legacy of colonialism, the violent and unfair distribution and management of large amounts of natural resources, and a failure of state institutions to govern effectively have all generated a context where violence is

cyclical, endemic and fed by competition over resources. While natural resources have been a catalyst for competition and prolonged conflict, they are not the original cause; the combination of deprivation, exclusionary politics, and broken state institutions has generated unstable situations. Additionally, regional and international actors with vested geopolitical and economic interests have obfuscated and complicated peacebuilding and further eroded political autonomy.

These findings highlight that sustainable peace in the DRC cannot be addressed only by temporary settlements or externally imposed solutions. A broad, inclusive approach is needed, prioritising structural inequalities, meaningful institutional reform, and respect for communities' local autonomy. Subsequently, the study calls for the establishment of a new



economic policy framework that draws from a fair distribution of wealth, a restructuring of systems of governance to ensure the genuine representation of federalism and local community autonomy, and the need for some form of national dialogue and reconciliation on the historic failures of the DRC. Without confronting these fundamental issues, the DRC cannot break its cycle of violence and realise its potential for stability and development.



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