

# CONFLICT DIAGNOSTIC: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

INAF 5203 International Mediation and Conflict Resolution



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Central African Republic (CAR) was thought to be on the path to stability in 2019, but further fighting erupted in late 2020 due to contested elections. This has continued a cycle of violence and unrest, leading to a deteriorating humanitarian situation. The aim of this diagnostic is to evaluate the current situation using a risk assessment methodology. Key trends and major risks, associated with nine thematic clusters, are used to highlight three potential scenarios in the short to medium term. Despite attempts to quell armed groups, ongoing violence and ethnic tensions remain major obstacles to achieving stability.

## BACKGROUND & HISTORY

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The CAR gained independence from France in 1960 but was soon beset by coups and political upheavals. The first president, David Dacko, was overthrown in 1966 by Jean-Bédél Bokassa, who declared himself Emperor of the Central African Empire.<sup>1</sup> Bokassa's regime was characterized by widespread human rights abuses and corruption, and he was eventually overthrown in 1979 by French and CAR military forces.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a series of coups rocked the CAR. A peace agreement was signed in 2007, leading to the formation of a unity government, but the country remained unstable and violence persisted. In 2013, a new rebel group, the Séléka coalition, seized power and installed its leader, Michel Djotodia, as the country's first Muslim president.<sup>3</sup> The Séléka regime was characterized by widespread human rights abuses, leading to the formation of anti-balaka Christian self-defence groups. The resulting conflict led to a humanitarian crisis and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the country has struggled to establish a stable government and restore security, despite numerous peace agreements and international interventions. In 2020 and 2021, the country was further destabilized by President Touadera's contested elections, leading to a resurgence of violence and unrest. The CAR remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, and continues to face significant political, security, and humanitarian challenges.<sup>5</sup>

## PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

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### Central African Government

The current President of the CAR is Faustin-Archange Touadéra, who took office in March 2016. The central government's control over its territory has been limited due to ongoing conflict. With foreign support, the CAR government has been able to maintain control of the capital, Bangui, and continue to gain further territory.<sup>6</sup> However, armed groups continue to hold large areas in more rural regions.

### Rebel/Armed Groups

The conflict in the Central African Republic involves multiple armed groups with different motivations such as political affiliation, religion, land, and ethnicity. In 2019, the government and 14 rebel groups signed a peace agreement supported by the African Union.<sup>7</sup> The Seleka is a former rebel coalition that staged a successful coup in 2013 but was accused of violence against civilians and dissolved in 2013.<sup>8,9</sup> The anti-Balaka is a Christian majority armed group formed in response to the Seleka coup that targeted Muslim majority villages.<sup>10</sup> The Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) is an armed rebel group formed in 2020 led by former President Francois Bozize<sup>11</sup>, made up of smaller armed groups including Anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka. The CPC opposes the current government<sup>12</sup> and has made attempts to seize the capital city Bangui.<sup>13</sup>

### Foreign and Multinational Forces

**Wagner Group:** A well-known Russian private military company, the Wagner Group has been in the Central African Republic.<sup>14</sup> It was reported that nearly 1,890 Russian instructors are supporting government security forces.<sup>15</sup>  
**Rwanda Defence Force (RDF):** the Rwanda and Car governments signed a defense agreement.<sup>16</sup> In 2020, Rwanda sent troops to the CAR to support security.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Rwanda is a contributor to the UN peacekeeping mission in CAR.  
**United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA):** Established in 2014, the UN outlined an ambitious mandate and clear priorities for the MINUSCA, including protection of civilians, support to the peace process, and support humanitarian assistance.<sup>18</sup> UN peacekeepers work alongside central government security forces to restore stability and security.

## SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS

<b>African Union</b>
Like many other conflicts on the continent, the African Union has played an important role in the Central African Republic. Prior to the UN led peacekeeping mission, the African Union deployed peacekeeping force in the CAR. The African Union is also involved in diplomatic efforts to bring peace and stability to the Central African Republic. The African Union played an important role in the 2019 peace agreement between the central government and multiple rebel groups.
<b>Neighbouring States: Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, DR Congo</b>
The ongoing civil conflict in the CAR has caused significant repercussions for surrounding states in the region, negatively affecting relationships with neighbors due to the flow of displaced people, small arms, and security challenges. Six Chadian soldiers were recently killed at the border and an investigation has been demanded. <sup>19</sup> Chad pulled out troops in 2014 due to accusations of violence. <sup>20</sup> Cameroon hosts nearly 50% of CAR refugees <sup>21</sup> , while Sudanese arms traffickers are accused of supplying small arms to rebel groups in the state. <sup>22</sup> These borders are porous, leading to security challenges. <sup>23</sup>
<b>France</b>
A former coloniser, France continues to play a role in the CAR. France has participated and led several interventions in the CAR. <sup>24</sup> More recently, France withdrew its last troop citing concern over Russian influence over the central government. <sup>25</sup>
<b>Russia</b>
Since 2017, the Central African Republic and Russia has been developing closer ties. Russia has supported the CAR in securing at the United Nations Security Council. <sup>26</sup> Russia has also supported the CAR central government through providing small arms. <sup>27</sup> With conflict in Ukraine dividing the international community, Russia is looking to the global south for allies.
<b>Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)</b>
The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) is a subregional organization recognized by the African Union, comprised of 11 member countries including the Central African Republic (CAR). ECCAS was present in CAR through the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic (MICOPAX) when the conflict erupted in 2012. ECCAS played a role in mediating between the CAR government and the Seleka rebel group, leading to the signing of a peace agreement in 2013, but the conflict still erupted and resulted in the downfall of President Francois Bozize's regime.

## RISK ASSESSMENT INDICATOR ANALYSIS

<b>Militarization</b>		<b>Trend: Deteriorating</b>	<b>Risk level: High</b>
<b>Stabilizing factors</b>	The CAR's military spending has remained consistent from 2016 to 2021, ranging from 1.4% to 2.0% of GDP, with the highest spending recorded in 2020 at 2.0%. <sup>28</sup> The country's military personnel size fluctuated from 2016 to 2019, with a 26.88% increase in 2018 to 10,150, but declined in 2019 by 1.48% to 10,000. <sup>29</sup> The import of arms has remained consistent from 2018 to 2020. <sup>30</sup>		
<b>Destabilizing factors</b>	In July 2022, the United Nations partially lifted an arms embargo in place since 2013, which resulted in a significant decline in arms imports. This should allow the central government to increase military expenditure. <sup>31</sup> The presidential guard has been recruiting personnel outside the established military recruitment process, with the guard being made up of members of the Mbaka-Mandja ethnic group (to which Touadéra belongs). <sup>32</sup> In 2022, disarmament program collected vast number of guns, grenades, and rocket launchers. <sup>33</sup> Sudanese arms traffickers have been accused of supplying small arms to Muslim rebel groups. <sup>34</sup>		

<b>Assessment</b>	The situation in Central African Republic remains unstable with various armed groups positioned across the country. The government military is expected to increase its procurement of weapons. However, the government security forces are not immune from the ethnic tensions contributing to the conflict. Rebel groups may be pressured to respond to the central government’s increased capacity by securing their own arms.
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<b>History of Armed Conflict</b>	<b>Trend: Stable Risk level: High</b>
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<b>Stabilizing factors</b>	After a flare-up of violence in 2020 and 2021 due to contested elections, there has been an improvement in the security situation in some communities in the North, East, and Central regions. This allowed for the return of a significant number of IDPs in 2022. <sup>35</sup> Although the CAR does not have a strong security apparatus, Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA) (supported by Wagner forces) have continued the offensive against militant groups with some success. <sup>36</sup> In November 2022, the Security Council renewed MINUSCA’s mandate for another year until November 2023. <sup>37</sup>
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<b>Destabilizing factors</b>	The FACA offensive has fragmented armed groups and disrupted illegal trade which these groups had been profiting from. <sup>38</sup> This has caused further reprisals against civilian populations, leading to an 80% increase of violence against civilians in 2021 when compared to 2020. <sup>39</sup> Although the Wagner group acts in support of FACA, it has also perpetuated abuses that have fueled counter-insurgencies against government troops. <sup>40</sup> The DRC Foresight outlook predicts a net increase of 18,000 individuals displaced in 2022, and a decrease of 40,000 in 2023. <sup>41</sup> However, the same model forecasts an increase of 600,000 in 2024.
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<b>Assessment</b>	Although President Touadéra continues to be supported by FACA (which in itself is directly supported by the Wagner group), the fracturing and restructuring of armed groups—especially in the west—will increasingly become a factor in the security situation. While fighting seemed to die down in 2019, battle related deaths due to state-based violence dramatically increased in 2021. Whether this trend continues is dependant on the ability of FACA to push its influence further into CAR. In December 2022, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN claimed that CAR “managed to overcome the most difficult phase of combatting.” <sup>42</sup>
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<b>Economic Performance</b>	<b>Trend: Deteriorating Risk level: High</b>
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<b>Stabilizing factors</b>	Despite lower growth, CAR has maintained a steady GDP per capita in recent years due to slower population growth. The increase in foreign direct investment, which has risen from 0.332% of GDP in 2017 to 1.199% of GDP in 2021 <sup>43</sup> , indicates that the country is becoming more attractive to foreign investors. CAR is rich in natural resources, including diamonds, gold, and timber, which provide a source of income and foreign exchange. <sup>44</sup> Like most African countries, CAR has a lower debt load than many countries outside the continent.
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<b>Destabilizing factors</b>	In 2021, the CAR posted an inflation rate of 4.26%, with the central government recently increasing fuel prices. <sup>45</sup> Its agriculture sector accounts for nearly half of its GDP and trade has been decreasing, suggesting a reduction in economic activity and global integration. The country made bitcoin a legal tender in 2022 along with El Salvador, but the cryptocurrency has been facing challenges. <sup>46</sup> The country is developing closer ties with Russia and western aid is being discontinued or attached to conditions. <sup>47</sup> There is high income inequality in the country and the majority of the population still lives below the international poverty line of \$2 a day. <sup>48</sup>
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<b>Assessment</b>	The economic outlook for the CAR is uncertain due to conflict and instability. The pandemic has hindered its economic progress. Its security issues and economic policies have caused tension with neighboring countries, leading to the closing of its border with Sudan. <sup>49</sup> The push for bitcoin was halted and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community remains concerned with the economic policies of the government. The CAR's relationship with Russia has impacted its reliance on aid (which amounted to over \$800 million in 2021). <sup>50</sup> The country may face financial pressure or incentives to take a position on the Ukraine crisis.
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<b>Governance and Political Instability</b>		<b>Trend: Deteriorating</b>	<b>Risk level: High</b>
<b>Stabilizing factors</b>	Although there was backsliding in all Worldwide Governance Indicators in 2021 due to violence surrounding the elections <sup>51</sup> , 2023 marks the second year of Touadéra's reign, which may bring some political stability. Despite the conflict, all indicators have remained relatively stable over the last five-year period (from 2021). <sup>52</sup> Overall Governance as measured by the IIAG has remained relatively stable, remaining towards the bottom of rankings (currently 50 <sup>th</sup> in Africa). <sup>53</sup>		
<b>Destabilizing factors</b>	Participation Rights, Inclusion & Equality, and Rights are all at their lowest measure since 2012, <sup>54</sup> and the CAR's Freedom score fell two points from 9/100 in 2021 to 7/100 in 2022. <sup>55</sup> Local elections—meant to have occurred in September 2022—have been postponed twice, now slated for July 2023. <sup>56</sup> Following a September 2022 decision by the constitutional court to invalidate the government's decision to remove presidential term limits, Touadéra replaced the president of the court. <sup>57</sup>		
<b>Assessment</b>	Local elections have not occurred since 1988. Touadéra's move to remove presidential term limits and the twice-now postponement of local elections does not bode well for future legitimacy-building. The approaching local elections have both the capacity to increase political violence (if they occur), and the capacity to further deteriorate the governance situation if they are again postponed or cancelled.		
<b>International Linkages</b>		<b>Trend: Deteriorating</b>	<b>Risk level: High</b>
<b>Stabilizing factors</b>	As of September 2022, MINUSCA has posted 15,000 peacekeeping personnel in the CAR. <sup>58</sup> The UN plans to withdraw personnel as the situation improves, but there is no set date. The CAR is a member of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), with the goal of greater regional integration and cross-border economic activities. <sup>59</sup> The CAR is a member of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). The CAR is a member of the AU, which played an important role in facilitating the most recent peace agreement in 2019. <sup>60</sup>		
<b>Destabilizing factors</b>	The Central African Republic (CAR) has received support from the Wagner Group, a Russian paramilitary organization, in its fight against rebel groups. <sup>61</sup> The CAR and Russia have developed a strong relationship, and pro-Russian protests have occurred in Bangui. <sup>62</sup> The European Union has dedicated funds to support internal security in the CAR as an effort to counter the Wagner Group's presence. <sup>63</sup> France has withdrawn its troops due to concerns over the country's closer ties with Russia <sup>64</sup> , while FACA is backed by Russia and Rwanda. <sup>65</sup> The country's internal instability has resulted in challenging relationships with neighboring countries, resulting in border tensions, deaths of military personnel, and displacement of people. <sup>66 67</sup>		
<b>Assessment</b>	The CAR continues to be the subject of attention for multiple states and international organisations. For now, the Central African Republic has found an ally in Russia. neighboring countries like Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon are all hosting CAR refugees. Furthermore, the country's porous borders have resulted in the movement of armed groups and weapons.		

<b>Population Heterogeneity</b>		<b>Trend: Deteriorating</b>	<b>Risk Level: Extremely High</b>
<b>Stabilizing Factors</b>	The UN estimates that Central African Republic has more than 80 ethnic groups, making it highly ethnically heterogeneous. The main ethnic groups in Central African Republic are: Baya 28.8%, Banda 22.9%, Mandjia 9.9%, Sara 7.9%, and M'Baka-Bantu 7.9%. <sup>68 69</sup>		
<b>Destabilizing Factors</b>	89% of the population is Christian, 9% of the population is Muslim, and 1% of the population practices folk religion. <sup>70</sup> The conflict between ethnic groups has been significantly aggravated by religion. Muslims continue to suffer from systemic discrimination, particularly regarding access to services such as citizenship documentation. <sup>71</sup>		

<b>Assessment</b>	The country's history of instability is primarily rooted in ethnic divisions, violent political transitions, corruption and economic failure, but it took on an important religious dimension in 2013. <sup>72</sup> Religious identity is understood to be one of the most significant predictors of violence in CAR. Muslims cannot practice their faith freely and there are extreme tensions between religious communities. <sup>73</sup>
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<b>Human Development</b>		<b>Trend: Deteriorating</b>	<b>Risk level: High</b>
<b>Stabilizing factors</b>	Infant mortality rate and incidences of HIV have all steadily improved from 2015 to 2020, decreasing from 88 to 78, and 1.12 to 0.65, respectively (per 1,000). <sup>74</sup> Life expectancy has remained generally stable since 2016 around 54 years, with a peak in 2019 at 55.03 years. <sup>75</sup> Education enrollment and completion are both at their highest levels, with 24.6% enrolled in education corresponding to their age, and 38.5% completing their primary education (23.1% completing both primary and secondary). <sup>76</sup>		
<b>Destabilizing factors</b>	Access to healthcare remains low, measured at 17.4 (down from a high of 30.1 in 2013). Access to water and sanitation is at its lowest level ever, with access to clean drinking water from improved sources remaining at 0.0. <sup>77</sup> The CAR is ranked 186 <sup>th</sup> out of 189 on the HDI, which has fallen since 2019. <sup>78</sup>		
<b>Assessment</b>	With nearly half the population being food insecure and just over half needing humanitarian assistance in 2023 <sup>79</sup> , the human development situation will likely remain dire. The ongoing conflict has severely impacted the country's infrastructure and limited the government's ability to provide basic services to its citizens. The health system has been severely weakened, with many health facilities damaged or destroyed, leading to limited access services, particularly for those living in rural areas and displacement camps <sup>80</sup> .		

<b>Demographic Stress</b>		<b>Trend: Deteriorating</b>	<b>Risk Level: Medium</b>
<b>Stabilizing Factors</b>	Central African Republic's population is nearly 5.5 million <sup>81</sup> , with a growth rate of 2.11% in 2021, up from 1.87% in 2017. <sup>82</sup> Its population density is 8.58 people per square km, slightly higher than in 2017. <sup>83</sup> However, high infant mortality, low population density, and net flow of emigrants offset this growth. <sup>84</sup> The urban population is 42.65% of the total population, an increase from 40.98% in 2017. <sup>85</sup>		
<b>Destabilizing Factors</b>	The Central African Republic urban population growth rate is at 3.17% annually, an increase from 2017 (2.76% annually), and this represents a high risk for CAR. <sup>86</sup> This country also has a moderately high youth bulge with 48.18% of the total population between ages 0 and 14. <sup>87</sup> More than two-fifths of the population is under the age of 15 in Central African Republic, and life expectancy is less than 50 years because of poor health conditions and services and inadequate food distribution. <sup>88</sup>		
<b>Assessment</b>	Despite CAR having a low population density, and a moderate-high growth rate, CAR's urban population growth rate represents a risk for CAR as most young people are unemployed and this has made them an easy target to be recruited by armed rebel groups. <sup>89</sup> That being said, the Central African Republic youth have been a force in this conflict. An important number of the youth has played a crucial role in the process of reconciliation, peace promotion and social cohesion. <sup>90</sup>		

<b>Environmental Stress</b>		<b>Trend: Stable</b>	<b>Risk Level: Low</b>
<b>Stabilizing Factors</b>	In 2020, forest areas in CAR comprised 35.80% of land area, a slight decrease from 35.94% in 2017. <sup>91</sup> Deforestation rates in CAR are low but not well documented. The country's first community forest was established in 2019 in the Congo Basin, empowering local communities to manage and protect their forests. <sup>92</sup> CAR has a low population density with 0.34 hectares of arable land per person in 2020 <sup>93</sup> and abundant water resources, including the Lake Chad and Congo River Basin <sup>94</sup> , with over 27,000m <sup>3</sup> of freshwater per capita. <sup>95</sup>		

<b>Destabilizing Factors</b>	Central African Republic has great agricultural potential as it is situated on a fertile plateau and is abundant in water resource. <sup>96</sup> Importantly, CAR's favoured climate and green pastures has attracted livestock herders from the Sahel and Lake Chad regions facing instability and increased scarcity of resources. <sup>97</sup> This seasonal migration across borders puts pressure on natural resources and sparks occasional conflicts between farmers and livestock herders. CAR is struggling to manage this extra layer of conflict. <sup>98</sup>
<b>Assessment</b>	Although the deforestation rate and access to freshwater and other natural resources are not of concern to CAR for the time being, the effects of climate change felt through extreme weather conditions, for example severe floodings, have disrupted traditional agricultural calendars. <sup>99</sup> As security checks have been lacking, seasonal migration is now accompanied by violence, destruction of field and increased competition for space and resources between farmers and herders.

## SCENARIOS FOR THE NEXT SIX to NINE MONTHS

<b>Best Case</b>
The FACA forces continue to push militant groups out of their territory with some success. Although the actions of the Wagner group may increase hostilities, the improved securitization may set the stage for legitimacy-building outside of Bangui and especially in the west. The local elections slated for July 2023 will not be postponed or cancelled and will be carried out with minimal and contained violence. This will mark a crucial step towards resorting the democratic process and fostering unity in the country. The elections may set the stage for increased investments into the economy and infrastructure, particularly in the mining and agricultural sectors. As per the DRC forecasts, there will also likely be a reduction in the number of displaced people in the upcoming year.
<b>Most Likely</b>
The government continues to make gains in reaching rural areas; however, the central government remains uninvolved in the daily lives of most citizens and unable to provide basic protection, needs, and services. Armed groups continue to control territory in the rural region of the CAR. In the coming years, civilians will remain at risk for violence and displacement. CAR's large youth population remains susceptible to recruitment by armed groups. The population relies on the actions of the CAR government, the international community, and other stakeholders to establish peace, stability, and the rule of law. MINUSCA has experienced losses but appears to be committed to remaining in the CAR. Given the ongoing Ukraine conflict and Russia's push to gain influence on the continent, the CAR will be forced to navigate Western and Russian interests. The CAR conflict will likely continue, largely unchanged and uninterrupted. The central government, backed by various external forces, will continue to make gains. The small arms flow will ensure instability and violence remain the norm. Further, with ethnic, religious, and political tensions still strong, community tensions will episodically manifest as violence.
<b>Worst Case</b>
The conflict in Central African Republic continues to deteriorate. An upcoming contentious election leads to another spike in violence. Food shortages increase. Rebel groups increase violent attacks on civilians and many more are forced to flee from their homes. Political stability remains unattainable and economic development cannot occur. The political space continues to shrink. Programs and radios are suspended during the presidential electoral period, and there is an inability to accurately report on abuses by rebel fighters, national forces, and international forces. Over half of the population lacks access to a sufficient source of nutrition and this increases exponentially. Food shortages increase and an extreme humanitarian aid crisis is declared. However, humanitarian aid shrinks even more as they are not spared from violence. They have little to no ability to provide assistance, build resilience and alleviate suffering in the country. The health care system is disrupted as attacks also affect medical infrastructure, health care professionals and patients. FACA continues to commit serious human rights violations, aided by an emboldened Wagner group.

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