



THE HANDBOOK OF
AFRICAN
INTELLIGENCE
CULTURES

RYAN SHAFFER



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Central African Republic

A Troubled Country with a Troubled Intelligence Culture

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The Central African Republic (CAR) is one of the most troubled countries on the African continent, surrounded by mostly failed or failing states in an extremely fragile region. With only six decades of independence, the country has experienced multiple coups d'état and wars. Besides the quest for power among the local interest groups, the former colonial power France, ambitious regional states, and some “newcomers” such as the United States, Russia, and China have also tried to build influence in the country. Considering that only a few years in the current millennium could be described as peaceful, researching CAR's intelligence culture is challenging. This is all the more daunting when taking into account that CAR's internet penetration is the fourth lowest in the world, which raises obstacles when researching the subject.

This chapter provides a brief introduction to CAR's intelligence services and culture by examining key historical events, actors, and issues. It has four parts that provide an overview of the country's background, intelligence history and culture, and foreign relations and actors, and then conclude with a discussion about broad aspects of CAR's intelligence culture. Making use of published material in several languages, it provides the first concise overview of CAR's intelligence.

BACKGROUND

CAR is a landlocked country of 622,984 square kilometers (387,104 square miles) and shares borders (clockwise from the north) with Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon (total length: 5,920 kilometers/3,679 miles).¹ The



country has not been stable for over a decade, and hundreds of thousands of people have been forcibly displaced. Indeed, the population varies greatly by source; it is estimated to be 4,745,185 (2019) by the World Bank, 4.8 million (2020) by the UN Population Fund, and 5,990,855 (July 2020) by the Central Intelligence Agency's public *World Factbook*.² Though there are about eighty ethnic groups, only two are responsible for half of the population: the Baya (28.8%) and the Banda (22.9%), while six other more major groups are above 5%. As for religion, 89.5% of the people following the Christian faith and 8.5% identify themselves as Muslims, according to an estimate in 2010.³

The economy is the fifth poorest in the world and is heavily dependent on unmechanized agriculture (43.2% of the gross domestic product [GDP]), with the undeveloped industry representing only 16% of the GDP.⁴ Forestry and mining (diamond and gold) are the backbones of the economy, but illegal logging and mining activities are estimated to be a larger portion of the economy. Moreover, the country has a US\$468 GDP per capita.⁵ This poor situation is coupled with an extremely limited transportation system: there are only 700 km of paved roads, only one airport with paved runways (Bangui), around 900 km of navigable river (Ubangi River, with only one port, at Bangui), and no railway system.⁶

The lack of development is demonstrated in other aspects of society. Though there are multiple cellular providers present, only 32% of the population have a subscription, and only 4.3% of the population have access to the internet (less than 1% broadband).⁷ The health-care system is greatly underfinanced resulting in only 0.07 physician per 1,000 inhabitants; CAR has the fifth worst maternal and third worst infant mortality rates in the world, and the fifth lowest life expectancy at 54.2 years (total population). The literacy rate is just 37.4%.⁸ The Human Development Index (2019) is 0.397, the second lowest after Niger.⁹

This situation has its roots in the country's history. Since gaining independence from France in 1960, CAR has been ruled by a series of autocratic leaders, even including a short period of turning the republic into an empire in the late 1970s. This relative measure of stability changed on May 28, 2001, when rebels stormed strategic locations in the capital, Bangui, in an unsuccessful coup attempt sponsored by former president André Kolingba. Though it failed to deliver the expected outcome, it divided the armed forces into two factions: supporters of then president Ange-Félix Patassé and their opponents, the supporters of General François Bozizé.¹⁰ Two years later, the latter faction was successful in overthrowing Patassé. Even though he had been elected to be president, armed opponents began revolting in 2004, starting the Central African Bush War.



Three years later a peace agreement was reached, but the fraudulent election that delivered him a second term in 2011 sparked tensions again. An alliance of rebel militia groups was formed called Séléka (“coalition” in Sango, the native language), which launched a successful attack on Bangui in March 2013, overthrowing Bozizé. Séléka leader Michel Djotodia assumed the presidency and established the National Transitional Council, which elected Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president in January 2014, but the predominantly Muslim Séléka and its enemy, the Christian militias, called “Anti-Balaka,” continued to fight. This resulted in mass killings and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Unsatisfied with the situation, Séléka leaders declared the independence of the Republic of Logone (Dar al-Kuti) in the northeastern region of CAR (the stronghold of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic, *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique*, FPRC), representing roughly one-third of the country.¹¹

In December 2015 a first round of presidential elections was held, followed by a second round in February 2016. Though many people could not participate because they were refugees outside of the country, the results were internationally recognized to help restore peace. Faustin-Archange Touadéra, Bozizé’s former prime minister (2008–2013), was elected president, vowing to work for unity and development; he was subsequently reelected in December 2020.

During the first two decades of the new millennium, the activities of armed groups determined the events in the country along with the presence of international forces from France (Operation Sangaris, December 2013–October 2016), Russia (advisers, military training, January 2018–ongoing), and the international community (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA, April 2014–ongoing; European Union Training Mission in the Central African Republic, EUTM-RCA, March 2015–ongoing).¹² Currently, there are fourteen armed groups recognized by the government and the international community, which are all signatories of the Khartoum peace agreement of 2019.¹³ There are other smaller armed groups and “self-defense groups” of varying sizes, strength, and influence, controlling around 80% of the country. This leaves mostly the capital and a few other locations under central government control.

CAR’S INTELLIGENCE HISTORY AND CULTURE

To maintain relative political stability, different CAR administrations needed intelligence. The first civilian intelligence organization was the Directorate of General Intelligence (*Direction des Renseignements Généraux*, DRG),

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