

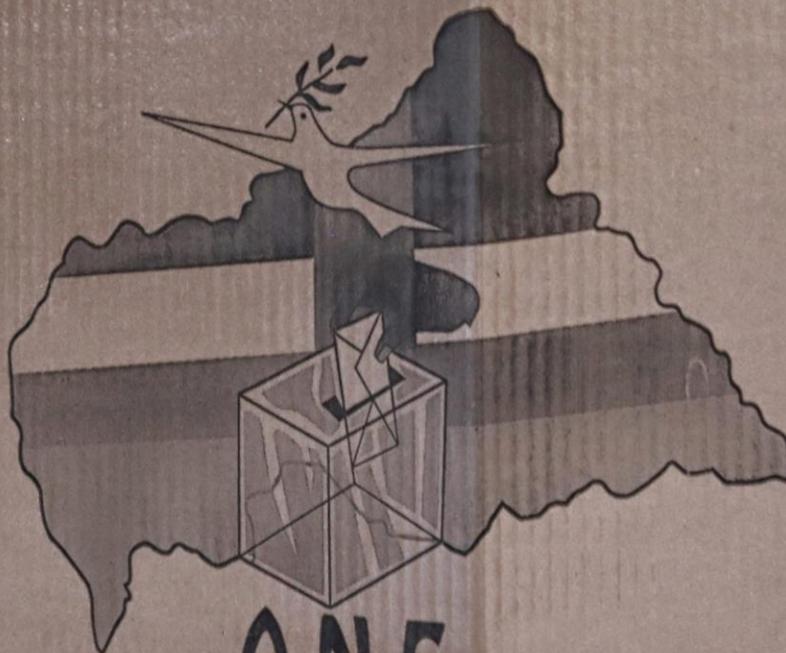


The Bangui Carousel

How the recycling of political elites reinforces instability and violence in the Central African Republic

By Christopher Day and
Enough Project team

August 2016



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Executive Summary

The successful February 2016 election of President Faustin Archange Touadéra marks a new beginning for the Central African Republic (CAR) and provides hope that the country is now stabilizing after three years of violence and political transition. Touadéra has been endorsed by many of his political opponents, and the country remained largely peaceful in the weeks following the elections.

But CAR is still a long way from political stability. If policymakers fail to address the structural issues that led to the crisis in CAR, the country is likely to repeat its violent past. Sworn in on March 30, Touadéra, a former math teacher and prime minister, faces massive challenges. Armed groups and criminal gangs continue to destabilize the countryside, controlling valuable mining areas and commercial towns where they extort illicit taxes and trade diamonds and gold. More than 2 million people, or half of the country's population, are experiencing hunger; close to 415,000 people remain internally displaced, and 467,000 refugees are only slowly trickling back.¹ Thousands of people have been killed since the March 2013 military coup by the Séléka alliance and the violence that followed.²

CAR has endured persistent violence and instability for decades. Institutional weakness, poverty, and exclusion do much to explain the country's history of disorder. But by significant measure, it is also the deliberate maintenance of such weakness by a small political elite that is at the root of CAR's endemic kleptocracy, a source of political instability, and a driver of violence in the country.³ Whether ushered in by coup or popular election, successive governments have proved unable to bring about meaningful change in CAR, in part because of the pattern of appointing many of the same people—often relatives and personal friends—to senior government offices.⁴

In sum, successive rulers in CAR have maintained authority largely by centralizing control where possible, and extended personal rule by dispensing patronage in return for political support, in particular by

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personally appointing to senior posts those who served in previous governments or trusted family members. This system has fostered division between the capital and the countryside, incubated the grievances of armed groups, and above all, created significant incentives to hijack the state through violence. This occurs as groups have competed for control of the state to access resources and privileges, instead of to benefit Central Africans.

This elite recycling is a key component of what we present here as the “Bangui Carousel” to reflect the many people who rotate through the country’s regimes, time and again. This pattern of elite recycling, which is not *per se* unique to CAR, is more critical in this country than elsewhere because it is interwoven with a near-complete lack of governance. There are few effective state or local government institutions, making the role and impact of the recycled individual leaders that much more potent. Unfortunately, it has been the complete dismantling of institutional checks and balances, the weakening of political parties and civil society organizations, and the use of violence to suppress opposition that have been the hallmark of many of these leaders.⁵

This combination of elite recycling on top of a governmental and civic system with little to no capacity and that often reinforces its hold on power through violence defines the Bangui Carousel.⁶ It is at the heart of what passes for Central African governance. The recycling and maintenance of a small group of elites—regardless of leadership at the top—combined with the absence of effective state institutions is a fundamental feature of government in CAR. Understanding this matters most to address the structural roots of the country’s persistent instability and eventually stop the Bangui Carousel from spinning, so that government can bring about the change the country desperately needs.

The Bangui Carousel is at the heart of what passes for Central African governance.

The recycling of elites is present throughout much of CAR’s modern history. To illustrate patterns of elite recycling, the report focuses on appointments to government ministries since early 2013.⁷ To gather information and supplement field research, the authors analyzed hundreds of presidential decrees, 15 of which provided information about government reorganizations ordered by former Presidents François Bozizé, Michel Djotodia, and Catherine Samba-Panza. This was then used to develop an overview of the members in each government and their inter-connections.

The report then focuses on some of the individuals who have participated in or benefited from the Bangui Carousel. Those in the report were selected for different reasons: their affiliations with different armed groups, their mere affiliation with past regimes, potential connections to corruption, or their family ties, each of which tends to undermine the possibility of good governance. The analysis has been done with the objective to understand how groups and individuals get access to the Bangui Carousel and how they often benefit from their political appointments at the expense of CAR’s citizens or simply forfeit the government’s ability to earn the public’s trust. Reference to any particular individual in this report does not, in and of itself, mean the individual is responsible for the violence or corruption that typically flows from the Bangui Carousel system. Rather, we highlight these individuals simply to demonstrate how the elite recycling element of the Bangui Carousel has worked. Subsequent reports will examine the governance elements in more detail, as well as the role of foreign powers, such as France and Chad, in perpetuating the system.

To disrupt, and eventually, stop the entirety of the Carousel, accountability and effective governance must exist in CAR. And in place of the Carousel, a system of principled governance and greater merit-based criteria for appointments responsive to the needs of ordinary Central Africans must be established. A way forward to accomplish this in part is addressed in the recommendations below. To this end, the Enough Project recommends the following:

Recommendations

Bringing change to the underlying governance structures in CAR, ending decades of misrule, and eroding widespread poverty requires clear direction and leadership from Touadéra. He must set forth policies targeting practices that sustain both the elite recycling and poor governance that mark the Bangui Carousel, and follow through with action against individuals who would seek to undermine any such positive efforts for their own benefit. This will take time and persistence, and will require sustained attention and engagement by the international community, both with financial support and accountability through sanctions and other multilateral measures. Such policies must ultimately strike at the core of elite behavior in CAR, steering governance away from nepotism and self-promotion and towards inclusion, accountability, and broad-based development.

- 1. Establish robust and independent anti-corruption institutions.** The CAR government should implement a transparent and accountable system for financial management, including a strong auditor general-type function, empowerment of tax authorities to ensure proper revenue collection measures are followed, and review of major contracts issued by both past and current governments. Anti-corruption bodies must be established within the new government, and senior officials should declare their assets upon appointment and annually thereafter. Although too early for the country to attain eligibility and seek membership, the principles and criteria of the Open Government Partnership should be used as a guidepost for the government.⁸ The U.S. government, European Union, the World Bank, and others should emphasize the importance of these steps and be prepared to provide assistance to support them.
- 2. Prioritize transparency in natural resource revenues, contracting, and spending to prevent corruption.** The U.S. government and other donors should urge the CAR government to set up mechanisms to prevent high-level corruption and provide technical assistance to help implement them. These should include a transparent bidding process for the awarding of natural resource concessions, the annual publishing of the government budget and establishing a requirement that natural resource exploitation contracts are made public. The government should engage with international institutions, such as the Open Contracting Partnership and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency, for assistance in this area, including in capacity building to use their data standards and governance models.⁹ Finally, the government should establish robust and independent anti-corruption mechanisms and implement budget and fiscal transparency measures.
- 3. Impose targeted sanctions and strengthen enforcement against those who undermine peace.** Development of the types of strong institutions referenced in recommendations #1 and #2 requires a complementary level of accountability. To this end, the U.N. Security Council, the U.S. government, and the European Union should impose additional sanctions on individuals and companies that attempt to undermine stability and the transition to good governance through acts of armed violence or through facilitating public corruption. Particular attention should be made towards enforcement

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of sanctions, as individuals in particular have been able to circumvent the sanctions because of insufficient enforcement. This includes direct outreach to ensure neighboring countries, particularly Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—and their financial institutions—implement asset freeze measures and travel bans imposed by the Security Council, as they are obligated to do as U.N. member states. Where these governments and their financial institutions lack in necessary capacity for effective implementation, the U.S. government and other donors should offer technical assistance.

- 4. Ensure that the restart of the Kimberley Process prevents the flow of conflict diamonds.** The restart of the Kimberley Process (KP) for rough diamonds in the Central African Republic could give the government legitimate revenue streams, or conversely, allow armed groups to profit from a conflict diamond trade again, depending on how it is run. The CAR government, United States, European Union, and the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) should help ensure that the voices of Central African civil society are truly included at all stages of the KP decision making process in CAR. Donors should also provide capacity building to CAR civil society organizations to properly monitor KP implementation and provide legal aid for civil society protection. In the key trading and manufacturing centers for CAR diamonds, specifically Antwerp, Dubai, Tel Aviv, and Mumbai, KP authorities should be communicating to industry actors about the need to demonstrate meaningful due diligence and following up to ensure such due diligence is occurring. Industry bodies should inform the trade about the KP's steps and ensure necessary vigilance by members of the trade. Where authorities or industry bodies discover violations or suspicious activity, action should be taken and reported publicly.
- 5. Restart the EITI process to make resource revenues more transparent.** If fully implemented, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) can help prevent and reduce corruption in the natural resource trade by making revenue payments and receipts transparent. CAR was suspended from EITI in 2013 because of the political instability. The newly installed CAR government should prioritize the work necessary to apply for removal of the 2013 suspension from EITI.¹⁰ This will include reconstituting the EITI multi-stakeholder group (with civil society and business participation), ensuring space for civil society and that necessary assistance is available, further developing the new work plan to implement EITI, and beginning to implement the new EITI 2016 standard, including identifying areas for data coverage and focusing on the pilot effort investigating beneficial ownership.¹¹ The international EITI board should only move forward with CAR's efforts to rejoin EITI once meaningful progress has been made towards these goals.
- 6. Strengthen the judiciary in CAR and promote Special Criminal Court prosecutions.** International donors such as the U.S. government, the European Union, and the World Bank should increase funding to rebuild the crippled judiciary in CAR, and in particular, make sure that the Special Criminal Court has sufficient funds, international expertise, and independence to operate and prosecute those responsible for human rights violations and abuses.
- 7. Help improve capacity and safeguards for civil society and the media.** The role of civil society and the press is critical in monitoring, and eventually diminishing, the Bangui Carousel and ensuring that those involved in government in CAR are serving the people rather than their own interests. The new CAR government should opt in to the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability, so that the country can benefit from the bank's capacity building opportunities for civil society.¹² The KP and EITI should ensure that civil society focused on the natural resource trade is able to monitor,

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report back, and participate in the processes without fear for safety. Separately, the U. S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) should seek ways to foster and support press freedom in CAR,¹³ a country where working journalists operate in a “Not Free” country, according to Freedom House.¹⁴

8. **Reform the government appointment process.** It is not unusual for political patronage to inform government appointments, but in CAR this has been extreme. The CAR government should develop and incorporate merit-based criteria for the appointment of ministers and other political appointees in CAR such that patronage is much more balanced with merit. CAR should also implement a process that requires appointed officials to declare assets.

How the Bangui Carousel works

Since independence from France in 1960, and arguably since the colonial period, political authority in CAR has been characterized by what anthropologist and former journalist Stephen W. Smith calls “concessionary politics,” where centralized state authority enables key elites to become the gatekeepers of natural resources. Access to such resources are then granted to outside economic interests in exchange for rents that are used to nourish patronage networks and deploy violence to demobilize rivals.¹⁵ The elite

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recycling component of the Bangui Carousel does not revolve, however, solely because of elite control of natural resources with little to no underlying governance, although this is sometimes an important feature. The Carousel also perpetuates itself through the widespread use and accommodation of patronage jobs, armed groups, graft, and in some instances, violence, as those with power struggle to maintain it.¹⁶ By extension, the pattern and functioning of the Carousel shows that the country’s elites are just as likely to be recycled as they are to be replaced.

Derisively called *La Mangeoir*, or “the trough” by ordinary Central Africans, the public sector in the country has long been characterized as a place to gain and maintain access to power and privilege through official title.¹⁷ Some of these elites have been systematically able to manipulate natural resources institutions in their favor. For example, when in power, François Bozizé tightened regulations for the diamond trade and monopolized much of the trade through a state-owned diamond company.¹⁸ He did this by appointing his nephew to head the mining ministry and replacing those with mining expertise with what the International Crisis Group deemed inexperienced members of his own tribe.¹⁹ Then, in October 2008, in what was dubbed “Operation Closing Gate,” he sent mining officials and military to take over the mines, where they confiscated diamonds, withdrew licenses, and imposed heavy fines in an attempt to take over the industry.²⁰ Deposed in 2013, Bozizé has been the subject of U.S. and U.N. sanctions since 2014 for his part in stymying peace efforts and contributing to violence in CAR.²¹

It is often said that the state in CAR “stops at PK 12,” the outer district of the capital of Bangui. This means that state institutions, public services, and the state security apparatus seldom extend beyond the city limits. Most public servants are political appointees, and those assigned duties in the provinces rarely stray from the capital, essentially stranding most of the country’s population at the far end of the state or

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state services.²² This breeds discontent and violence, but as explained by a seasoned U.N. civil affairs officer with several years of experience in CAR,

“Armed groups are formed as a means to [capture] power and resources, not to change anything about the system or improve conditions for the people.”²³

CAR has experienced five military coups followed by multiple international interventions to reign in dictators and to tame widespread violence in the country.²⁴ Most international observers and Central African leaders would agree that the most recent interventions by France, the African Union, and United Nations, albeit with varying degrees of success and allegations of sexual abuse against civilians, did play a role in stabilizing the country.²⁵

However, the decreased violence will be difficult to sustain without reforming CAR politics. The country’s main political actors have traditionally exhibited an unwillingness and inability to fundamentally transform the nature of CAR’s governance away from existing largely to sustain elite political networks or their economic interests and towards building a more inclusive, transparent regime that provides greater services to Central Africans. As a result, the public remains very suspicious of leaders who are closely associated with previous regimes, regardless of their individual culpability in wrongdoing, yet this pattern of recycling continues often to ensure short-term stability and hold off fresh counter-rebellion.

Changing such a system is no easy feat, especially in a country with a history of distrust for government. Although Touadéra is a familiar face in CAR government, having served as prime minister from 2008 until Bozizé’s toppling in 2013,²⁶ his election presents an opportunity to change CAR’s mode of governance, where elections are not just about reshuffling elites but also about forging an inclusive national project with accountability for financial and human rights crimes.

The transitional government of Michel Djotodia

The Séléka rebellion began as a nebulous coalition of factions and scattered fighters drawn from CAR’s northeastern borderlands with Chad and Sudan. Their common goal was ousting a weakened Bozizé, and by extension, his government’s nepotistic and kleptocratic practices.²⁷ Despite the Séléka’s takeover in March 2013, the short-lived, 10-month government of Michel Djotodia doubled down on the nature of the Bangui Carousel. Just over a year later, the United States levied sanctions against Djotodia for his role in undermining peace and stability in the country.²⁸

Shortly after taking power, Djotodia suspended the constitution and dissolved the government and the national assembly.²⁹ Djotodia quickly began emptying state coffers, parceling out lucrative business opportunities to members of his entourage in Bangui, and assuming control over clandestine trade and informal taxation outside the capital, according to the International Crisis Group.³⁰ Despite being one of the few Séléka leaders with direct experience in government, he struggled to manage internal challenges to his authority from other Séléka strongmen and mercenary fighters from Chad and Sudan.³¹ A primary mechanism to pursue his corrupt imperatives, based on analysis of available materials, appears to have been the use of government appointments, particularly those key ministerial positions with tangible, fungible resource linkages in order to dispense patronage and the security apparatus in an attempt to control the country, which obviously failed. In 10 short months as president, Djotodia issued an average

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of 50 decrees per month, some of which were used to reshuffle government ministries.³² The high number of decrees stands in stark contrast to Bozizé's 272 for all of 2012.

Djotodia appointed a full cabinet of 34 members, keeping for himself the presidency and the defense minister post. Senior Séléka members dominated the government, including several controversial figures that set about using their positions to wantonly assert themselves.³³ Notoriously feared commander and rebel fighter Nourredine Adam became the public safety minister and the government spokesperson. In charge of the CAR intelligence police, he “carr[ie]d out many arbitrary arrests, acts of torture and summary executions,” according to a United Nations sanctions committee.³⁴ People across Bangui reported that Nourredine and his entourage made random arrests and fired indiscriminately at civilians during their frequent security operations.³⁵ Bangui's Boy-Rabe area, which later became an Anti-Balaka stronghold, was put at particular risk, according to first-hand witnesses who lived in the Boy-Rabe area.³⁶ In a 2013 interview with Human Rights Watch investigators, Adam denied responsibility for violence in Boy-Rabe or attacks in other parts of the country.³⁷ Nonetheless, Adam has been the subject of U.S. and U.N. sanctions since May 2014 for his role in the violence and undermining of peace efforts.³⁸

Mohamed-Moussa Dhaffane, the Séléka's third in command, was appointed Minister for Water, Forests, Hunting, Fishing, Ecology and the Environment. This may have been ironic, as civil servants from the ministry claim that one of Dhaffane's first actions in office was to organize the looting of the ministry's storage room that held precious animal skins and valuable ivory.³⁹ Dhaffane has denied such claims.

By a string of other appointments, Djotodia signaled that a main priority of ministerial appointments was holding together his shaky coalition through accommodations for a new set of political insiders. Abdoulaye Hissene (aka Issene) became the Minister for Youth and Sports.⁴⁰ As a seasoned rebel commander, Hissene was a leader of the armed group Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP),⁴¹ created in 2008 in Vakaga prefecture,⁴² and which later joined the Séléka. He was also a seasoned diamond collector, who controlled diamond-rich areas.⁴³ Djotodia's nephew, Herbert Gontran Djono Ahaba, was made Minister of Mines, Petroleum and Energy and later public works minister.⁴⁴

Yet it is important to note that in addition to populating government ministries with Séléka strongmen and relatives, Djotodia also recycled elites from the Bozizé era in an attempt to extend the pattern of accommodation—a key aspect of the elite recycling component of the Bangui Carousel. Chief among them was the appointment of Nicolas Tiangaye as prime minister, a post he had held previously as part of the Bozizé government as well as Minister of Finance and Budget.⁴⁵ Another example was Rizigala Ramadane, a Djotodia nephew,⁴⁶ who was minister of City Planning, Reconstruction of Public Buildings, and Land Reform under Bozizé.⁴⁷ When Djotodia came to power and announced his first cabinet, Ramadane had

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the same title.⁴⁸ He later gained the additional office of Resident Minister of Haut-Mbomou prefecture and succeeded Dhaffane as the water and forestry minister.⁴⁹ Sabin Kpokolo, the Minister of Labor, Social Security, and Vocational Training under Bozizé,⁵⁰ also stayed put.⁵¹ The ministers may not have broken the law, committed crimes, or been connected to specific acts of violence, but the fact that they were held over—despite the fact they served in the very regime that had been toppled by Djotodia in a coup— shows the strength of the elite recycling component of the Carousel.

The consequences of the Djotodia government are now quite clear. He was motivated more by his personal priorities than bringing peace or inclusive leadership to CAR. During Djotodia's brief time in power, disorder swelled throughout CAR, a by-product of the Séléka violence and the ongoing neglect of the country. In particular, his lack of control over Séléka fighters, the formal dissolution of the alliance without disarmament, and their subsequent violent predations created the conditions that gave rise to the Anti-Balaka militias and the country's inter-communal bloodletting.⁵²

The transitional government of Catherine Samba-Panza

After months of turmoil in which he failed to control the inter-communal violence, and facing international pressure and questions over his legitimacy as CAR's leader, Djotodia resigned from the presidency on January 10, 2014, at a regional economic summit.⁵³ He was replaced 10 days later with a new Transitional National Government led by Catherine Samba-Panza.⁵⁴ In contrast to most of her predecessors, Samba-Panza did not follow a violent path to the presidency. Yet as CAR's president, she nevertheless exhibited patterns of recycling and poor governance that continued to sustain the Bangui Carousel.

Facing CAR's worst crisis since independence, Samba-Panza became leader of a nation with empty coffers, hollowed out by decades of institutional decomposition, and with large swathes of the countryside controlled by armed groups. Despite being appointed the mayor of Bangui during Djotodia's reign, as a lawyer and businesswoman she was largely viewed as having no concrete ties to any of the conflict's main actors. And upon taking office, she immediately called on the country's myriad fighters to disarm and professed intolerance for disorder.⁵⁵

Yet despite being undergirded by substantial international intervention and support, the transitional government immediately confronted new challenges that tested Samba-Panza's ability to project authority in any meaningful way. Merely two weeks into her tenure a group of soldiers from the national army, FACA,⁵⁶ lynched a suspected ex-Séléka member at an official army ceremony, just minutes after Samba-Panza, who was speaking at the event, had proclaimed to restore security and declared, "... [E]veryone will be held responsible for their acts."⁵⁷ The whole affair was captured on camera,⁵⁸ but none of the perpetrators were arrested and no official investigation was launched.⁵⁹ This event reflected CAR's climate of widespread impunity and the government's perceived inability to provide basic security in Bangui.

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In the following months, reports surfaced that Samba-Panza may have begun to replicate familiar patterns of self-aggrandizement and corruption. For instance, the French magazine *Jeune Afrique* reported on the possible embezzlement of up to \$2 million of aid from the Angolan government, which Samba-Panza herself had personally requested from the Angolan president.⁶⁰ Samba-Panza denied any wrongdoing.

But what of the Bangui Carousel?

Samba-Panza's first government consisted of 20 ministers plus the president and the prime minister, a considerable reduction from the previous Djotodia government with 34 members.⁶¹ The new president's first ministerial appointments in January 2014 suggested a positive deviation from the nepotistic norm of past governments, which were exemplified by both Bozizé and Djotodia appointing nephews to head the mining ministry during their respective tenures as president.⁶² Instead, the lion's share of Samba-Panza's first cabinet members were technocrats, many of whom were part of CAR's diaspora with prestigious international careers. To some extent, their cosmopolitan and professional profiles mirrored Samba-Panza's own history as a business owner, corporate lawyer, and women's rights activist.⁶³ For example, she appointed André Nzapayeké prime minister. Educated in the Netherlands, he brought an impressive resume that included stops at the World Bank, the European Union, and the Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC), where he was a vice president.⁶⁴ Three members of the ex-Séléka remained in the government, including Séléka political operative—and Djotodia nephew—Herbert Gontran Djono Ahaba as Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works.⁶⁵ Presumably, the notion of including a few ex-Séléka in the government was developed to give the appearance of inclusion and reconciliation. As expected, many in the Anti-Balaka seethed with resentment as they did not have any official representatives in this first iteration of government.⁶⁶

A few other elites from previous eras were recycled. For example, Colonel Thomas Théophile Tchimangoua became the Minister of Defense.⁶⁷ As the former chief of Bozizé's Presidential Guard, he had a personal history of fighting against the armed groups in northern CAR that eventually united under the Séléka.⁶⁸ Still, by and large, the government was at first broadly accepted locally and internationally,⁶⁹ and gave new hope to the peace process. For a moment, many in Bangui felt the crisis in the country was passing.⁷⁰

However, as the months progressed, it became clear those ministers who had made their careers elsewhere and returned to CAR did not fully grasp the political situation in the country and many rarely ventured outside of Bangui.⁷¹ In response, the former mayor-turned-president began surrounding herself with many more advisors and assistants, who included former Séléka officials,⁷² close friends, and even family. Her oldest daughter, Christelle Sappot, was her Chief of Staff Independent. Sappot acted as a personal secretary to her mother and often was the line of contact to outsiders.⁷³ Just one month before leaving office, Samba-Panza appointed Sappot ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, as one of her final acts as a president.⁷⁴ Reflecting on the appointment, a local civil society leader in CAR echoed a common critique of the political elite and the transitional government,

*"The people do not trust the politicians and the transitional government; they are all the same. The political elite have power and money, but all they do is to put their own friends and family in front of the population."*⁷⁵

In the run-up to a large U.N. peacekeeping force deployment and alongside increased commitments from international donors, the transitional government began replicating the patterns of past administrations in CAR, and members of the Bangui Carousel began populating Samba-Panza's government. Following the July 23, 2014, Brazzaville ceasefire agreement between ex-Séléka and Anti-Balaka,⁷⁶ which had built momentum for changes to the government, and coupled with the scrutiny from international donors, Samba-Panza undertook her first major cabinet reshuffling, which included replacing Nzapayeké as prime minister.⁷⁷

The number of ministers increased to 27 plus two new deputy ministers.⁷⁸ She appointed Mahamat Kamoun as prime minister. While the first Muslim to hold the post and without direct linkages to violence, his appointment nevertheless reflected common patterns of elite recycling and nepotism. A former senior officer in the Ministry of Finance, he became Director General of the Treasury under Bozizé until a falling out with Bozizé drove him to seek political asylum in the U.S. in 2007.⁷⁹ He returned to CAR in 2013 to become Djotodia's cabinet chief of staff.⁸⁰ Some civil society members criticized the appointment due to Kamoun's marriage to Rachel Ngakola, Samba-Panza's cousin and director of the National Customs Service.⁸¹ In the Bangui bars, he was reportedly referred to as "the brother-in-law."⁸² As expected, his appointment to prime minister drew criticism from hardliners within ex-Séléka, led by Djotodia and Nourredine, who demanded the prime minister position for one of their own as had been agreed, so they claimed, at the regional summit where Djotodia resigned.⁸³

While ex-Séléka representatives maintained their offices, the representation of other armed groups expanded.⁸⁴ Armel Ningatoloum Sayo became Minister of Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture.⁸⁵ A one-time prominent FACA officer under President Ange-Félix Patassé (1993-2003), Sayo was the founder and leader of the Revolution and Justice (RJ), a rebel group based in northern CAR created in late 2013.⁸⁶ In the weeks leading up to his appointment, armed members from his group were en route to Bangui on a 'peace march' to voice their frustrations and demand to meet with the transitional government.⁸⁷ Sayo signed the Brazzaville agreement and his men withdrew a few weeks before his appointment, signaling the ongoing role the threat of violence played in "negotiating" into the prevailing political establishment.⁸⁸ Former vice coordinator of the Anti-Balaka, Sébastien Wénézoui, was made minister of Environment, Ecology and Sustainable Development as another controversial appointment.⁸⁹ These appointments highlighted how Samba-Panza rewarded recycled elites and members of armed groups.⁹⁰

Despite drawing initial hope of political reform and stability, Samba-Panza's transitional government was a disappointment to some Central Africans. Critics highlight that violence continued throughout the country during most of her tenure, while she continued the pattern of rewarding members of armed groups and recycled elites with high-level positions, rather than carrying out a strategic vision of improved governance for CAR.⁹¹ As a local journalist explained,

"At first we had hope in Samba-Panza and her new government, but we were quickly disappointed as the violence continued. ... Leaders of the armed groups were added to the government while there were no jobs for the ordinary people."⁹²

However, others have argued that Samba-Panza did manage to steer CAR towards peaceful elections with very limited resources and that her politics of inclusion helped curtail the worst rebel groups.⁹³ In the end, though, she did not do much to change regime politics in CAR. Today, the Carousel remains intact with a former prime minister—Touadéra—now the president and the director of his presidential campaign and

a former chief of staff—Simplice Sarandji—appointed as new prime minister, heading up the new government.⁹⁴

Reworking governance in CAR and the way forward

“Revolution is the only way to change the system.” - Nicholas Tiangaye, former prime minister and presidential candidate.⁹⁵

Being a leader of an armed group in CAR has by some accounts supplanted traditional political parties as what grants access to the prevailing political establishment and a seat in the government.⁹⁶ This means outsiders can access the Bangui Carousel through violence or the threat of it. Alternatively, insiders can invite former rebels or militiamen into the Carousel via government decree, as Samba-Panza did when she expanded her transitional government to include members from the armed groups Anti-Balaka, ex-Séléka, and Revolution and Justice.

Ending this practice and dismantling the elite recycling and poor governance that define the Bangui Carousel will take time and must come largely from a new bargain between CAR’s political class and the country’s civil society. And although it is still unclear whether Touadéra will pursue this path, there is a much needed role for sustained international attention to help change the status quo from nepotism and elite recycling to an inclusive and broad-based development agenda. Identifying the pressure points within the Central African elite can shift to a new equilibrium where the elite is ‘forced’ to pay attention to the country outside of the capital, become more inclusive, and less focused on its own aggrandizement, with benefits for society and citizens at large. This effort must start with the Touadéra government and undergird its policy efforts. This will be a difficult course, but the good news for the new president and the international community is that policy mechanisms and leverage to motivate such changes in elite calculations are available. These include: additional targeted sanctions and improved enforcement; prosecutions for human rights abuses and corruption and an independent judiciary; greater transparency in natural resource revenues, government budgeting, spending, and contracting; and media freedom, broad-based civil society and citizens’ involvement in politics.

Elites whose behavior obstructs the fragile peace process and facilitates corruption in CAR should face targeted sanctions.

International actors such as the U.N. Security Council, the European Union, and the U.S. government have established targeted sanctions regimes—asset freezes and travel bans—against Central African individuals and companies.⁹⁷ To date, these have yielded mixed results. For example, although former President Bozizé is subject to these sanctions, he has continued to travel across Africa, as has senior Séléka leader Nouredine Adam, also on the sanctions list.⁹⁸ There are also reports that these men continue to provide support to armed groups in CAR.⁹⁹

Thus sanctions enforcement needs to be strengthened going forward. Countries that allow sanctioned individuals to travel or do not freeze their assets should be pressured directly by the U.N. Security Council and key governments. This pressure should include direct outreach to financial institutions holding accounts for sanctioned individuals and

entities, as well as their host governments. Should this pressure fail, additional sanctions focused on these regional actors should be considered. This enforcement regime can follow the example of the sanctions levied against CAR's largest diamond company, Bureau d'Achat de Diamante en Centrafrique (BADICA), and its Belgium sister company, Kardiam, for alleged diamond trade with armed groups, which have been rather effective in targeting these companies' operations.¹⁰⁰ U.N. officials interviewed for this report stated that trade by the company had virtually ceased as a result of tight implementation.¹⁰¹ By extension, elites whose behavior obstructs the fragile peace process and facilitates corruption in CAR should face targeted sanctions.

Additionally, a dysfunctional justice sector remains a major challenge to stability in CAR. Very few members of the political and business elite in CAR have faced prosecutions for corruption, violence, or support to armed groups.¹⁰² There are, however, encouraging signs of progress within the judiciary. Last year saw the creation of an innovative Special Criminal Court with national and international judges to prosecute and investigate grave crimes committed since 2003.¹⁰³ The court is, however, not yet fully operational and struggles with insufficient funding.¹⁰⁴ International donors including the United States have pledged their financial support for the court and should now follow through.¹⁰⁵ The International Criminal Court (ICC) has also opened a second investigation in CAR, after recently convicting former Democratic Republic of Congo Vice President Jean Pierre Bemba for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by his forces in CAR in 2002-03.¹⁰⁶ This new probe focuses on more recent waves of violence allegedly orchestrated by some elites on the carousel.¹⁰⁷ The ICC is also expected to coordinate closely with the Special Criminal Court.

Very few members of the political and business elite in CAR have faced prosecutions for corruption, violence, or support to armed groups.

These are two important initiatives, which bring some hope that decades of impunity are slowly coming to an end. But it should not be forgotten that the national judiciary in CAR needs restructuring, including its physical infrastructure as many courthouses not already dilapidated were destroyed during the civil war. Above all, CAR's judiciary needs to be independent and free of political influence and threats. International donors should work closely with the new government to reestablish the national judiciary with financial support and fresh training for judges, and sufficient security for witnesses.

Lack of transparency in public spending and corruption, often in the form of hidden signature bonuses for government contracts, especially within the natural resources sector, are often cited as the primary reasons for rebellion.¹⁰⁸ Some senior civil servants and elected officials have reportedly gone to great lengths to maintain their offices—at times through violence, threats, and patronage—as they provide relatively easy access to large sums of money and privileges.¹⁰⁹ The natural resources sector deserves particular attention as it is the most valuable industry in CAR, and it is a major source of foreign exchange for the state. The government should prioritize requiring asset declarations by senior officials and other measures included in the Open Government Partnership's criteria.

Public sector reform can also include reopening the country's training center for local administrators who are deployed throughout the country; the center closed three decades ago.¹¹⁰ Replacing inexperienced appointees who rarely set foot in the provinces with properly trained officials with incentives to run local

administrations can begin to build the necessary legal-bureaucratic linkages that over time can supplant the rickety patronage networks that barely extend outside Bangui.

A broad-based administrative system in CAR can cut into the parallel economy controlled by armed groups including ex-Séléka and Anti-Balaka, which are directly involved with the illicit natural resource trade—diamonds and gold in particular—a key revenue source to support their violent operations.¹¹¹ Ex-Séléka groups, for example, are firmly in control of the country's largest gold mine Ndassima, located about 40 miles north of Bambari, making up to \$150,000 in forceful taxation from miners and traders per year.¹¹² They have reportedly earned as much as \$3.87 and \$5.8 million dollars annually from direct trade with diamonds and taxation of miners and diamond traders, respectively.¹¹³

In addition, tackling corruption and increasing transparency requires prosecutions, pressure, and investigations by non-governmental organizations and the media, combined with adherence to international initiatives like the Kimberley Process (KP) to safeguard clean diamonds. Rough diamond export from CAR was suspended in 2013 to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the KP pipeline.¹¹⁴ Local Central African civil society will have to play an important role in closely monitoring the restart of rough diamond exports within the Kimberley Process. Moreover, the restart of work toward full implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) can play an important role to ensure transparency in natural resource payments, particularly if implementation focuses on the key elements of the new 2016 standard, such as beneficial ownership transparency. The government should also be encouraged to follow the principles of the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency and the Open Contracting Partnership,¹¹⁵ since natural resource contracts have a history of being well hidden from the public in CAR.¹¹⁶ International donors must strongly support and monitor those actions of the new government, but be ready to issue tougher measures if patterns of secrecy, corruption, and exclusion of civil society continue.

The path forward needs to address state weakness and corruption that create permissive conditions for violence. In CAR, systematic political exclusion has created permissive conditions for expressing grievances within a state where institutions are not there to provide an arena for the fair and peaceful allocation of natural resources and public goods. Rather, politics and governance in CAR have more often been a zero-sum game between rival elite networks that appropriate the state for their own interests. As such, the political system in CAR is made up of elites, some of who jockey for government posts, where they often seek rents and lucrative avenues of accumulation. This behavior, in turn, feeds the cycles of resentment as the majority of Central Africans continue to live in grinding poverty and in a vacuum of economic opportunity. To disrupt and stop the Bangui Carousel, efforts must be made to increase transparency and accountability to bring about a real governing structure operating with oversight and given some trust by citizens. Touadéra now has a unique chance to turn the system around. Working closely with the international community, he should base appointments on qualifications, launch a fight against corruption, and arrest those responsible for violence, while promoting transparency and international investments to rebuild the country.

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