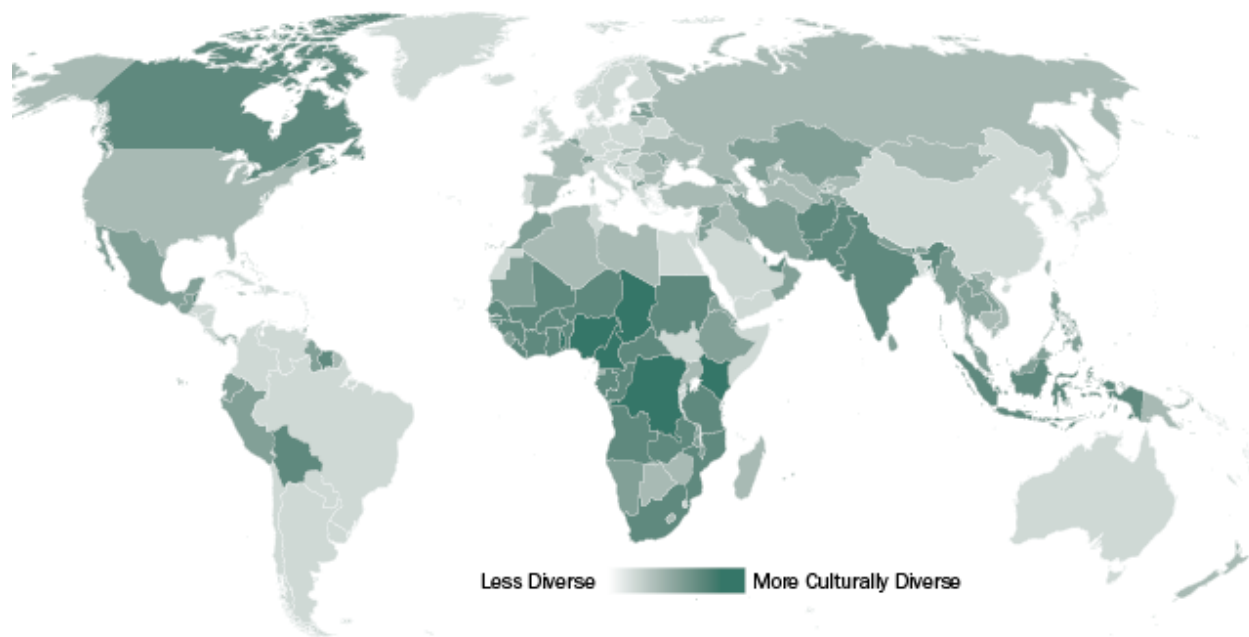


The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse countries in the entire world. It is home to over 200 different native languages and ethnic groups. The four most common indigenous languages are Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba. They, along with French, are considered the official languages of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, of the 211 individual languages present in the DRC, 8 are threatened, 3 are moribund, 4 are nearly extinct, and 1 is extinct (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2015).

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## Cultural Diversity Around the World

*The countries with the most and least cultural diversity*



Based on Table A1 in "Economic Effects of Domestic and Neighboring Countries' Cultural Diversity" by Erkan Goren. Center for Transnational Studies, University of Bremen Working Paper No. 16/2013

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<sup>1</sup>Figure 1: Cultural Diversity Around the World

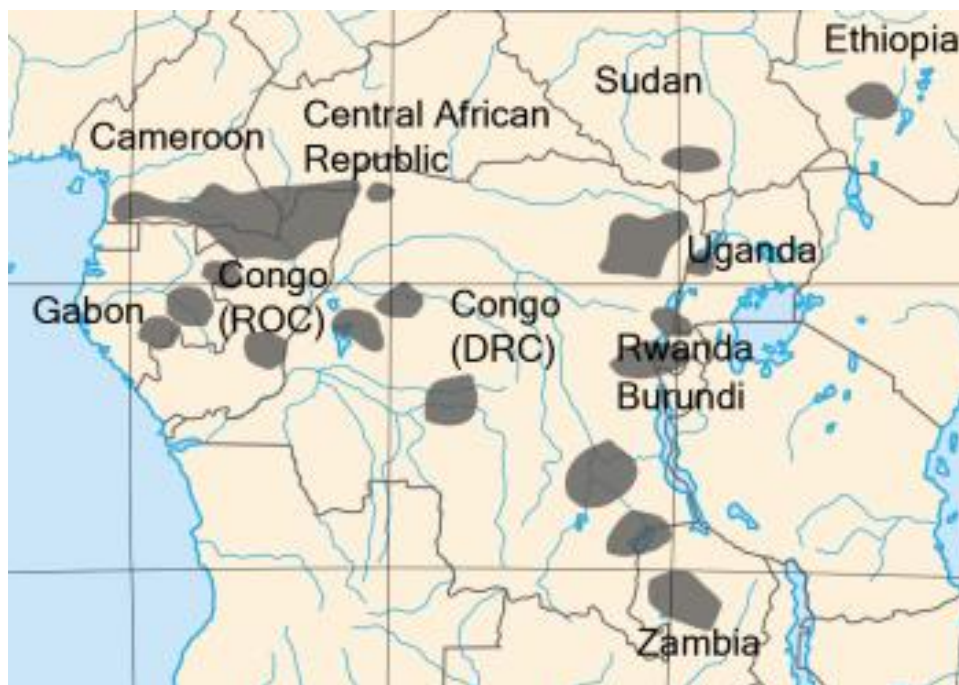
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<sup>1</sup> Figure 1: A map showing the cultural diversity of the countries, with lighter color being less diverse and darker being more culturally diverse. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is shown as a dark green. It is one of the most culturally/ethnically diverse countries in the world.

Source: Pew Research Center

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was a colony during the Age of Imperialism, when many countries that were colonized by Western powers lost their national identity, and instead adopted the language and sometimes culture of their colonizer. However, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is unique in that they were able to keep a selection of their native language. Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba were all allowed to be taught in the schools set up in the Congo.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is also home to the second-largest rainforest in the world, the Congo Rainforest. However, with the increase in industrialization and urbanization in DRC, deforestation has become a major problem that threatens the existence of many indigenous people of the Congo (Hemedi, 2014).



<sup>2</sup>Distribution of Pygmy groups Throughout Tropical Africa

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<sup>2</sup> Figure 2: A map showing the distribution of Pygmies in tropical Africa. Most of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is tropics and temperate forests. The grey areas on the map show the locations of various groups of Pygmies. The DRC is home to a number of tribes of these indigenous people.

Source: *The Origins of the Forest-Dwelling African Pygmies*

The indigenous people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, commonly known as the Pygmy people, is one of the most endangered cultures in the DRC. The Pygmy people are thought to be one of the first groups of people to settle in the Democratic Republic of the Congo region.

Currently, there are only approximately 600,000 Pygmies in the entire country. The people are split into four groups, with the Batwa being the primary group, consisting of about 100,000 people (Minority Rights Group International, 2005). The indigenous people face a variety of threats. Not only are many tribes being forced from their homes in the forests, it is causing “a weakening of their traditional economy, the irreparable abandonment of their cultural practices and increasing poverty” (Hemedi, 2014).

Additionally, many of the indigenous people have suffered during the conflict and war that has ravaged the Democratic Republic of the Congo for decades. During the war, the Pygmy people were the target of mass killings as the various armies sought to gain control of the territory. Rebel armies were often responsible for the pillaging Pygmy villages, torturing and killing men, and brutally raping and murdering the women. In 2003, there were allegations of “atrocities, including mass murder and cannibalism, carried out by the military and other armed groups against the indigenous pygmy minority” (United Nations News Centre, 2003).

Currently, the Congolese government is seeking to promote and protect the rights of the indigenous people of the DRC. In 2013, the Congolese government drafted the Law on Indigenous Peoples, which sought to ensure the rights of the indigenous people. Many organizations are also working to allow the Pygmy people access to the judicial courts in the country.

In addition to these political efforts, there has also been more efforts by the people to learn about these indigenous people and their cultures. In December 2013, the National Indigenous Peoples’ Festival was held for the first time in the capital of the DRC, Kinshasa. The festival had several aims, including “celebrating indigenous culture and mobilizing public opinion around indigenous issues by using the

festival as a strong advocacy and lobbying tool” (Hemedi, 2014). The festival was one of the many factors in bringing the injustices of the Pygmy people to the public eye, both national and internationally.

Hopefully, with this new awareness of the many different endangered people and their cultures, the Democratic Republic of the Congo can still maintain their standing as one of the world’s most culturally diverse countries. In the future, as the Congolese nation grows and develops, they will still be able to protect the indigenous people of the forests. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done, and the Pygmy people are still a long way from enjoying an equal status in the country. However, as more people become aware, and the government actively promotes the protection of the people and their culture, there will hopefully be a reversal of fortune for the Pygmy tribes.

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