



Image: REUTERS/Kenny Katombe

Your connection to the Democratic Republic of Congo



Coltan (short for columbite–tantalites and known industrially as tantalite) is a dull black metallic ore from which the elements niobium and tantalum are extracted. The niobium-dominant mineral in coltan is columbite (after niobium's original American name, columbium), and the tantalum-dominant mineral is tantalite.

Tantalum from coltan is used to manufacture batteries for electric cars, and in tantalum capacitors used in **electronic products**.

Are you connected to Congo via your electronic device? Explore [Todd C. Frankel's Washington Post Article "THE COBALT PIPELINE"](#) and then, using your smartphone and/or computer, try and discover where the coltan contained in your battery came from.

- Find out the exact name and model of your phone.
- Find out if your battery uses coltan
- See if you can discover where your smartphone manufacturer sources its coltan. If you can't find this information, what can you do as a consumer to get it?
- If your coltan is not sourced in Congo, where does it come from and what are the working conditions for people at those mines?