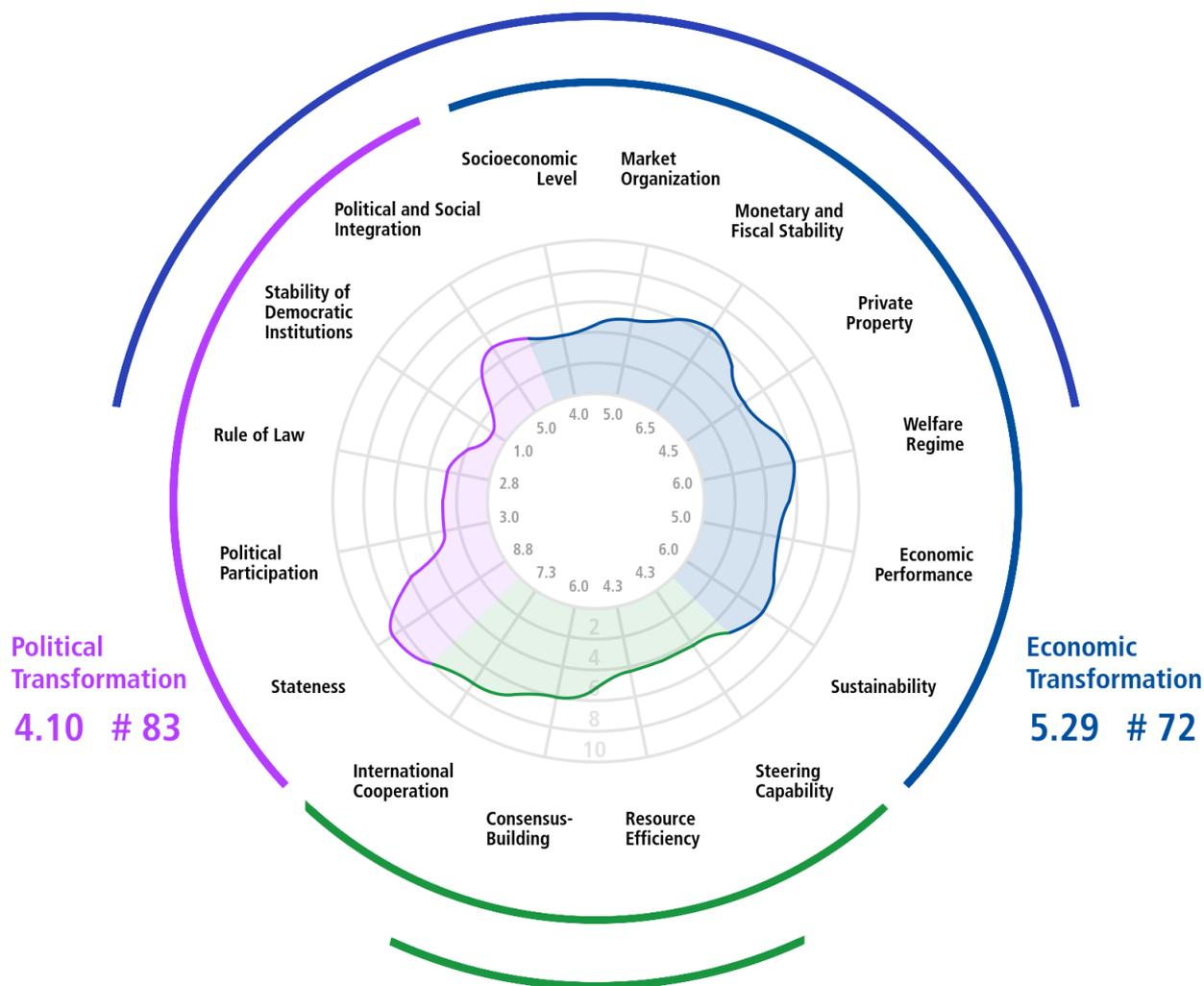


Gabon

Status Index

4.69 # 81

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
4.10 # 83

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5.29 # 72

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4.79 # 62

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026**. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	2.5	HDI	0.733	GDP p.c., PPP \$	21510
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.2	HDI rank of 193	108	Gini Index	38.0
Life expectancy	years	68.3	UN Education Index	0.670	Poverty ³	% 8.1
Urban population	%	91.3	Gender inequality ²	0.505	Aid per capita \$	21.4

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

The period under review, 2023 – 2025, has been the most radically transformational in Gabon since independence in 1960. In the wake of a series of West African coups, the August 2023 coup d'état in Gabon marked a very different kind of political transition. General Brice Oligui Nguema, a distant cousin of deposed President Ali Bongo, had been head of the Republican Guard. He was a disgruntled insider of the Bongo regime, not a (democratic) revolutionary. After suspending the constitution, and the existing executive, legislative and judicial institutions, he was named transitional president by members of the military junta over which he presided. He quickly appointed a new legislature and cabinet of ministers to ensure continuity of governance (if not government).

General Oligui Nguema then held a national dialogue in April 2024 with more than 500 to 600 participants, including hundreds from civil society, who presented nearly 1,000 recommendations for a new constitution. Many of these recommendations were incorporated by Oligui Nguema into the draft constitution that was submitted to popular referendum on November 16, 2024, and which received almost 92% approval. He then announced that the first round of national elections would be held on April 12, 2025, beating his own democratic transition timetable by four months. These developments were positive for democratization in Gabon, which had been stalled by more than five decades of one-party rule under the Bongo dynasty.

Nevertheless, the new constitution does not prohibit members of the military who participated in the 2023 coup d'état from running in elections, and Oligui Nguema is widely expected to announce his candidacy and win the presidential race. Some call this a “civilianization” of military rule. Others view it more favorably as a reward for the man who finally deposed the kleptocratic Bongo regime. Oligui Nguema is widely popular in the country, especially among ordinary Gabonese citizens.

The former ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) is not allowed to participate in the first legislative elections. Therefore, a new (potentially coalition) government is expected to emerge. The new constitution has abolished the position of prime minister, establishing a presidential regime. Whether the legislative branch will have meaningful checks on presidential power remains to be seen and will depend on the personal ambitions of Oligui Nguema. Nguema won the presidential election held on April 12, 2025, with parliamentary elections scheduled for August 2025. However, as the period under review ends in late January 2025, this report and its scores do not reflect developments thereafter.

Internationally, Oligui Nguema has maintained Gabon's close alliances with the West, including former colonial power France (which other military juntas in West Africa have formally abandoned), the European Union and the United States (with whom Gabon has a new strategic partnership), rather than joining the Russian camp in the New Cold War. Regionally, Oligui Nguema has conducted direct diplomacy with all Central African heads of state, securing recognition of his regime and endorsement of its timeline for a democratic transition to civilian rule. He has also made significant efforts to reassure international lenders and is working with international financial institutions to renegotiate Gabon's public debt, which swelled during the 14 years of kleptocratic largess under his predecessor Ali Bongo.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Over the long term, Gabon has gradually progressed toward greater national sovereignty, democracy and free market economic development. After gaining independence from France in 1960, Gabon remained deeply enmeshed in a neocolonial relationship that maintained French dominance over its currency (the Central African CFA franc), extractive sectors (Total in petroleum, Comilog in manganese, Rougier in forestry), education (French), cultural exchange (la Francophonie) and security (hosting Camp Charles de Gaulle). Gabon gradually liberated itself from French domination, finding new partners in America and East Asia, and achieving national sovereignty, especially through its natural resource wealth, which increased its negotiating power.

Democratization did not begin until the end of the Cold War, when France demanded that recipients of its international development assistance liberalize their political systems. Initially playing along by holding constitutional conventions and transitioning from a one-party regime to a multiparty electoral system, President Omar Bongo used his diplomatic influence to ease French pressure and amended Gabon's 1991 constitution to secure de facto one-party dominance for his Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) while abolishing term limits, allowing him to remain president for life. After his death in 2009, his eldest son Ali Bongo took control of the PDG and became president, ending the democratic transition with a kleptocratic and dynastic form of rule before the 2023 military coup toppled the Bongo dynasty.

Having inherited an export-oriented, capitalist extractive economy from his predecessors, transitional President General Brice Oligui Nguema has maintained the country's long commitment to free market capitalism, openness to private investment in its extractive industries and financial liberalization within the constraints of the French-controlled CFA franc zone. This policy framework has enabled Gabon to report one of the highest per capita wealth figures in sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite well-above-average GDP per capita, Gabon faces significant income inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 38.8. Public debt, now estimated at 70% of GDP, is elevated above the sub-Saharan African average of about 60%. The transitional government, eager to buy legitimacy with popular spending programs but also keen to maintain its credit line with international lenders, finds itself trapped in a cycle of debt. Weak governance, high public debt, poor economic performance, a poor government payment record and social vulnerabilities are the main factors increasing Gabon's debt crisis.

Although Gabon is blessed with abundant natural resources, the rapid depletion of its oil and gas reserves means the future of Gabon's economy does not look as strong as previously. Historically, Gabon's oil production has been concentrated in one large oil field and supported by several smaller fields. As the largest field matured and production declined, a new, large field would typically emerge to replace dwindling output. Gabon's greatest success, the Rabi oil field, significantly boosted the country's total output in the 1990s, reaching 217,000 barrels per day at its peak in 1997. Although Rabi is still one of Gabon's largest producing fields, it has matured and production has gradually declined. Since the beginning of Rabi's descent, no new, large field has emerged, as recent exploration has yielded only modest finds.

The promise of major Chinese investment in Gabon's untapped Belinga iron reserves has not borne fruit, and Ali Bongo's attempt to transform the Gabonese economy into a "Green Gabon" based on sustainable forestry and ecotourism also failed to materialize. Large palm oil plantations, Chinese clearcut forestry and massive indebtedness to Chinese government lenders are all that remain of what the Bongo dynasty once believed would turn Gabon into the Singapore of Africa. And unless something changes, Gabon will become the Borneo of Africa.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

There is no competition with the state's monopoly on the use of force across the entire territory. No group seeks to secede from the central state. Most of Gabon is covered with dense rainforest and has few roads, which would make it an ideal environment for a rebel movement if one existed. However, there is no rebel movement or armed insurgency in Gabon, and the state alone controls the entire territory, assisted by pre-positioned French troops at Camp Charles de Gaulle outside Libreville. Organized crime or other groups do not control any significant part of the country. The coup in August 2023 and subsequent developments have not changed the state's monopoly on the use of force.

The vast majority of the population accepts the nation-state as legitimate. The Gabonese are proud nationalists and have been since independence in 1960, even exhibiting forms of xenophobic nationalism.

In the wake of the recent upheavals in Gabon, the question of Gabonese citizenship as a prerequisite for political participation has been addressed by the recent referendum on the new constitution, which includes several nationality requirements for anyone seeking to run for president. This new "Gabonité" requirement – that one must be Gabonese – demonstrates how firmly the concept of a true national identity has taken hold in the public mind. In part, this is a reaction to the occupation of powerful government posts by foreigners during the decade of rule by Ali Bongo, who surrounded himself with non-Gabonese advisers, called his "foreign legion." However, it also reflects a long-standing strain of xenophobia in the country following independence, as demonstrated by the periodic mass expulsion of foreigners, including Lebanese merchants and Equatorial Guinean refugees.

Following Communiqué No. 27, issued in November 2023, the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI) is actively seeking to promote patriotism. All public sector institutions are required to hoist the national flag in a ceremony held each Monday before work begins.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

10



State identity

9



Gabon is a country that lacks religious divisions.

The majority of Gabon's citizens are nominally Christian, with a strong element of syncretic practices that blend traditional religious cults. The state remains secular, following the French-style concept of *laïcité*. About 6% of Gabon's population practices Islam, including President Ali Bongo. Most adherents follow Sunni Islam, while the majority of Muslims – about 80–90% – are foreigners. The government's television stations provide free airtime to the Catholic Church, Protestant congregations and Islamic mosques. Alongside these global religions, Gabon embraces numerous indigenous African religions, which are freely practiced by its people. The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice.

The oldest religions in Gabon are those developed locally by the country's approximately 40 Bantu peoples, most of whom have lived in the rainforests. These religions are called "traditional" because they were created by non-literate peoples. Unlike Christianity and Islam, these belief systems have been preserved not through sacred scriptures but through oral traditions that evolved over many centuries. Gabon's traditional religions have also included secret initiation societies for both males and females. Elders in these organizations instruct initiates in the moral, physical and intellectual knowledge and values of their peoples at different stages of development, from adolescence to maturity. Despite the presence of official Christian churches and Islamic organizations, these ancient religious norms still wield considerable influence over the ruling clans.

In the November 2024 constitution, Article 13 proclaims, "The freedoms of conscience, thought and free practice of religion and worship are guaranteed to all."

Although many development indicators go unreported by Gabonese government authorities, almost all people (91.6%) are reported to have access to electricity. Urbanization in Gabon, driven by superior infrastructure and facilities, is especially evident in Libreville, where more than 97% of residents reportedly have access to clean drinking water. In contrast, fewer than 55% of rural residents enjoy similar access. Nationwide, World Bank data from 2022 indicates similar figures: 59.3% of the population has access to water, 21% to sanitation and 47.1% to electricity

The African Development Bank has funded the Integrated Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Program, which has significantly improved water accessibility in the cities of Estuaire province, encouraging migration from the overcrowded capital to nearby towns by expanding water access to 20,000 residents. The proportion of the population using basic sanitation services increased from 34.0% in 2000 to 49.9% in 2022. As a result, about half of the population is reported to have access to basic sanitation services – that is, piped sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines, ventilated improved pit latrines, composting toilets or pit latrines with slabs. In this sense, the state has a basic administrative structure that provides public services

No interference of religious dogmas

10



1

Basic administration

6



1

throughout the country. However, there are noticeable differences in the provision of services between those who live in cities and those who live in the rainforest. Some forest communities are completely cut off from state services, especially during the rainy season.

In the most recent 2024 Afrobarometer poll, respondents were asked how many times in the past 12 months they or a family member had to face a lack of drinking water for domestic needs. Twice as many rural respondents (34%) as urban respondents (16%) answered “always.” When asked if their home was connected to the Gabon Energy and Water Company, 14% of urban and 66% of rural respondents answered “no.” Regarding whether they had a toilet or latrine in their home, 56% of urban respondents and only 9% of rural respondents answered affirmatively.

2 | Political Participation

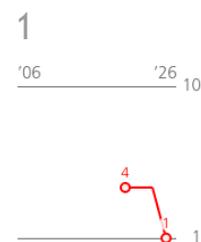
In August 2023, the military seized power in a coup d'état following a chaotic national election. By the end of the period under review, the country's political leadership had not yet been established through free and fair elections, despite a post-coup referendum. Although presidential elections have been held since the end of the review period, resulting in victory for the coup leader, parliamentary elections remain pending at the time of writing, with plans to hold them in August 2025.

Prior to the coup, President Ali Bongo Ondimba had announced his intention to run for re-election and was expected to win. Over the previous decades, the constitution was repeatedly revised to preserve the Bongos' hold on power, despite formally guaranteeing democratic principles such as universal suffrage. First, term limits were removed from the constitution, allowing Bongo to serve as president for life. Second, traditional two-round ballots were replaced with a single-round ballot to prevent Bongo's opponents from rallying around a single challenger in a run-off. Third, instead of requiring the winner to obtain a majority, all that was needed for Bongo to be re-elected was a plurality. Fourth, in April 2023, the presidential term was reduced from seven to five years, ensuring that presidential elections would occur at the same time as legislative and local elections. Previously, following a presidential election, opposition parties would organize against Bongo's ruling party to capture seats in the legislative and local elections. Prior to the 2023 coup, all the institutions of government power could be taken by Bongo and his party in a single election.

Ali Bongo, son of former President Omar Bongo (1967–2009), had the backing of the ruling Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG), founded by his father, which had monopolized power in the oil-rich Central African country for 56 years.

Nineteen opponents registered as candidates for the presidency. Among them were a former prime minister, Raymond Ndong Sima; a former vice president, Pierre-Claver Maganga Moussavou; Paulette Missambo, head of the Union Nationale coalition of

Free and fair elections



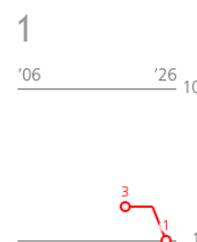
opposition parties that challenged Bongo in 2016; and a former minister of mines, Hughes Alexandre Barro Chambrier, who throughout the year had tried to rally other opposition leaders behind a single candidate, without success. The Gabonese opposition was, once again, divided.

After amending the constitution to permit presidential, legislative and local elections to be held simultaneously – a move designed to preserve the ruling PDG monopoly over all three branches of government – the regime also disabled internet access to prevent ordinary people from organizing on social media. It barred both foreign electoral observers and foreign journalists from reporting on what many viewed as a fraudulent spectacle. Voting booths in opposition strongholds did not open until six hours after the legal opening time and the authorities failed to print enough ballots bearing opposition candidates' names in those districts. The regime quickly announced an overwhelming 64.27% victory for its candidate Ali Bongo, whereas alternative ballot counts at 1,000 voting stations attributed 68% to opposition candidate Albert Ondo Ossa.

All that remained were the predictable protests, riots and repression. But this time, soldiers refused to play their usual role. General Brice Oligui Nguema told the French ambassador in Libreville that “the army no longer wanted to be used to kill Gabonese after each election.” Ali Bongo was forced into house arrest in Libreville, while his first lady and heir apparent son were arrested.

Since the end of the Cold War and under pressure from foreign donors, Gabon has held multiparty elections for the presidency, the National Assembly, the Senate and local government posts. All of these were dominated by the ruling PDG, which held an effective monopoly on power until the August 2023 coup that ended both the PDG's rule and the country's democratic institutions. The new military junta, represented by the Republican Guard, announced the dissolution of all elected government institutions, establishing in their place the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI), with General Brice Oligui Nguema sworn in as transitional president on October 4, 2023. He named Raymond Ndong Sima as prime minister of the transitional government and, on September 8, 2023, General Oligui Nguema appointed all the members of Sima's cabinet. On October 6, he made sweeping changes to the cabinet, replacing potential political rivals with loyal military officers from the junta. In October, Oligui also appointed a transitional parliament consisting of a 98-seat National Assembly and a 70-seat Senate. Until new elections are held, all political decision-makers in Gabon of any significance are currently appointed, not elected, and none have veto power over the junta's decision-making authority

Effective power to govern



Before the coup, both association and assembly rights were protected by the constitution but were subject to government restrictions. The U.S. State Department, in its Human Rights Practices, reported “serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation,” especially restrictions on the right of assembly but much less on freedom of association.

After the coup, the military junta proposed consultations with civil society to promulgate a new constitution. After months of dialogue, the text was submitted to a citizen referendum and approved by 92% of the electorate. Among the fundamental rights guaranteed by the new constitution, Article 21 affirms “the right to form associations, political parties or groups, unions, companies, establishments of social interest as well as religious communities,” but adds the proviso that this right is “subject to respecting the principles of national sovereignty, public order and preserving the moral and mental integrity of the individual.” This leaves open the question of whether that last clause could be used as a pretext to shut down opposition NGOs or protest movements.

There are few legal constraints imposed on individuals who want to form or join non-governmental organizations or other interest groups. However, when such groups challenge the power structure of the status quo, they have faced repression by security forces on a case-by-case basis.

With the military junta inviting civil society to actively participate in the drafting of proposals for the new constitution and with broad civil society support for the final draft in the subsequent referendum, it appears that civil society is playing an active role in governance. Moreover, the new constitution reflects the determination of opponents of the Bongo regime to block any Bongo dynasty member from returning to power. This victory represents an advance for civil society in Gabon.

On election day in August 2023, the government of Ali Bongo blocked internet access and suspended three France-based media outlets: France 24, Radio France Internationale and TV5 Monde. Following the August 2023 coup, General Oligui Nguema restored internet service, reversed the suspension of the three French outlets and publicly stated that he wants to work with journalists. Gabon appears to be improving its score in the World Press Freedom Index published May 3, 2024, by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Among the 180 countries assessed, Gabon scored 65.83 and climbed 38 positions from rank 94 to 56. Nevertheless, RSF warned that “the advent of a free and independent press is yet to be a reality, in particular because of the media regulator’s heavy-handed sanctions.”

In the recent 2024 Afrobarometer poll, 67% of respondents reported feeling “fairly” or “entirely” free to express their opinions. However, many remain unaware of the emerging challenges in the ongoing struggle for freedom of expression. Although a new constitution, promulgated on December 19, 2024, includes clauses protecting digital rights and privacy, strict regulation of the use of information technologies

Association /
assembly rights

5

'06 _____ '26 10



1

Freedom of
expression

5

'06 _____ '26 10



1

could, if poorly implemented, be used to restrict free expression and monitor citizens. The front line of free expression is digital communication, and the regulation of information technology and digital media has often been used as a tool to restrict opposition and control critical speech. If imposed repressively, these provisions could affect press freedom, citizen expression and the ability of dissidents to organize online. Control of information flows could also lead to internet shutdowns during elections or the monitoring of dissenting voices. For now, the military junta has proven no more restrictive than the Bongo dynasty.

3 | Rule of Law

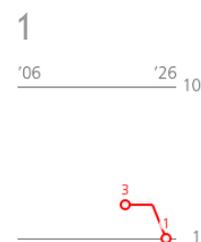
A few days after the controversial presidential election in August 2023, a group of soldiers declared a military coup that overthrew the government and deposed President Ali Bongo. General Brice Oligui Nguema was appointed by the junta as the transitional leader. When a coup d'état is staged, it is not in accordance with the principle of the rule of law. It is deliberately contrary to it. In all coups d'état, there are no pretensions by the plotters to follow the procedure described by the constitution of a given country. Constitutions provide neither for a transfer of power by coup d'état nor for a military government.

The doctrine of the separation of powers is based on the proposition that government has three basic branches. It holds that concentrating these three areas and powers in one body is dangerous to liberty or that none of these three branches should exercise the functions of the others. The doctrine can be understood as aiming to prevent tyranny by confining too much power in any one person or body and ensuring that one power is checked by another. The doctrine also seeks to design a system of checks and balances.

Military administration, however, is based on a monolithic structure with a concentration of powers. It rejects the diffusion of authority and power. The essential requirement of the doctrine of separation of powers is often negated in military administrations, particularly in the case of the head of a military government. At the same time, the executive authority of the country is often vested in the same person, with that authority exercised either directly or through individuals or authorities subordinate to him. This amounts to a virtual concentration or fusion of important powers at the highest level of government, a situation not consistent with the doctrine of the separation of powers.

After the August 2023 coup d'état, instead of establishing a military regime, General Brice Oligui Nguema quickly formed a transitional civilian government. He assumed the civilian title of transitional president and, in September 2023, named Raymond Ndong Sima as the transitional prime minister. Sima then appointed a civilian cabinet of ministers, including several former military officers. From a strictly de jure

Separation of powers



perspective, Gabon has a civilian government, although it is de facto led by an all-powerful transitional president, who is a former general and ultimately controls the government and political life in the country.

At first, the status of Gabon's bicameral parliament was unclear. On October 5, 2023, General Oligui Nguema appointed members of the new National Assembly and Senate for a transitional period, ahead of promised elections at an unknown date. A regime spokesman read the names of 98 new members of parliament on national television, including opposition party figures and some who supported ousted President Ali Bongo. Under Bongo, the parliament had legislative powers but was reduced to rubber-stamping the ruling party's policies.

One year after the coup, Oligui Nguema announced on national television that a referendum would be held on November 16, 2024, on a new constitution. This action represents more than just constitutional reform. From a juristic perspective, the decisive criterion of a revolution is that the existing order is overthrown and replaced by a new order in a manner that the former did not anticipate. The old order ceases to be valid and all norms within the new order derive their validity exclusively from the new constitution. A new norm grants the revolutionary government legal authority. If the democratic reformers fail, their undertaking constitutes an illegal act, and they can be charged with treason according to the old constitution and its basic norm. This did not occur in Gabon.

Until the coup, members of the powerful Bongo dynasty operated above the law. However, on the night of the putsch, Ali Bongo was arrested and placed under house arrest. In addition, his son Noureddin Bongo with several young relatives and relatives of former First Lady Sylvia Bongo, who were serving in the presidential cabinet, were also arrested. Subsequently, images surfaced showing them surrounded by trunks, suitcases and bags overflowing with banknotes, reportedly worth hundreds of millions of euros, which had been seized from their homes. Sylvia Bongo was arrested, charged and placed under house arrest. On September 28, 2023, she appeared before court, where she was charged with money laundering, receiving stolen goods, forgery and use of forgeries. Ali Bongo's son and several of his allies were also arrested, and charged with high treason and corruption, and placed in custody. On September 8, 2023, Gabon's military leaders freed Ali Bongo, allowing him to seek treatment for serious health problems overseas. However, his wife and eldest son Noureddin were kept under house arrest. In October, the transitional prime minister, Raymond Ndong Sima, spoke about government plans to prosecute ministers under Mr. Bongo. Having corruptly exploited Gabon's natural resource wealth with impunity, the arrest and detention of these individuals represents an improvement in the ability of the justice system to hold the rich and powerful accountable. Yet, the new constitution, promulgated in December 2024, includes a law of amnesty that protects General Oligui Nguema and members of his junta. In this sense, the justice system is still not capable of holding all men accountable before

Independent
judiciary

2

'06 '26 10

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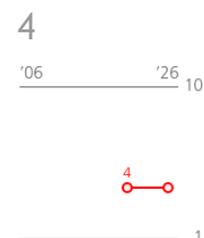
the law. Lawyers for Ali Bongo, his wife and their son announced on January 9, 2025, that the appointment of an investigating magistrate in connection with their complaint of “arbitrary detention” and “sequestration” was not fair, and they should all be released.

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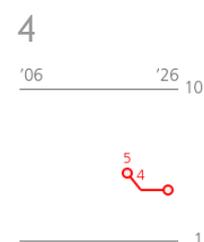
Article 12 of the new constitution, promulgated on December 19, 2024, declares, “No one may be humiliated, ill-treated, tortured or subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, even when under arrest or imprisonment.” Yet, safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention have not been upheld by the police. Detainees are often denied access to lawyers and lengthy pretrial detention is common. After the successful August 2023 coup, the perpetrators of state violence became the unchallenged rulers of the government. Former First Lady Sylvia Bongo, and her son and heir apparent Noureddin Bongo have remained under house arrest for almost two years without facing trial.

Under military rule, on the night of October 12/13, 2023, Karl Stecy Akoué was out with friends when they failed to return home before the military curfew. They were arrested, stripped and beaten with wooden slats. Falling into a coma, Akoué

Prosecution of office abuse



Civil rights



succumbed to his injuries and was declared dead a few days later. When the affair became public, the Ministry of Defense denied the accusations and claimed that the perpetrators were criminals dressed as soldiers.

According to human rights reports by the U.S. State Department, social stigma prevented women and historically marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQ+) persons from participating equally in political life. This form of discrimination has worsened since the 2023 coup. Article 25 of the new 2024 constitution now defines marriage as “a union between two people of the opposite sex.”

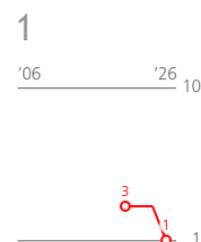
4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Following the August 2023 coup d'état, the military junta annulled the previous election and dissolved state institutions, effectively ending Gabon's 25-year democratic transition, which had begun with the 1990 National Conference but largely failed to deliver lasting reform. The current de jure transitional government is for now a de facto authoritarian regime, presided over by General (also transitional President) Brice Oligui Nguema and a junta of military officers, who overthrew Ali Bongo and the formerly all-powerful, now dissolved, Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG). When asked in a recent 2024 Afrobarometer poll if it is legitimate for the armed forces to take control of the government when elected officials abuse their power for their own interests, 89% of respondents answered affirmatively.

The ensemble of democratic institutions that once existed in Gabon has become a set of shells filled with politicians hand-picked by Oligui Nguema and the junta. While Nguema has acted with care and paid special attention to existing political compacts – given his long-standing role in the former PDG regime, as well as the Bongo dynasty and his knowledge of Gabon's power structure – neither his personal ascension to power by coup d'état nor his appointment of politicians to parliament and government conforms to any democratic principle. Therefore, Gabon is an authoritarian regime moving toward a promised democratic transition. The transitional period leading up to democratic elections was set at 24 months, with the possibility of an extension. And, while the military government in Gabon has promised to hold elections in August 2025, challenges remain.

At the end of April 2024, Gabon's lengthy and peaceful process of national dialogue concluded. The talks brought together the military junta, led by coup leader General Brice Oligui Nguema, and civil society, represented by 580 civilians. The national dialogue symbolized the junta's intention to return to civilian rule, hear the people's voices and repair the old constitutional order, which had been corrupted by 56 years of Bongo dynasty rule.

Performance of democratic institutions



General Oligui Nguema established a transitional government and convened the dialogue to chart a path to democratic rule. At the dialogue's conclusion, he received a report containing nearly 1,000 proposals. According to the published report, Gabon will abandon its French-style dual executive -- in which a president shares power with a prime minister -- and adopt a presidential system, with a legislature providing checks and balances for the president.

Members of Ali Bongo's former ruling party, the PDG, are disqualified from holding public office for three years. However, the dialogue did not bar Oligui Nguema from serving as president. This new constitutional arrangement is expected to result in two years of benign, popular personal rule until elections are scheduled.

One year after the coup, Oligui Nguema announced on national television that a referendum on a new constitution would be held on November 16, 2024. This will be the first election held in the country since the 2023 coup d'état. A simple yes/no referendum on a new constitution is the bare minimum of modern electoral practice. Nevertheless, voter turnout was high (70%) and the proposed constitution won substantial approval from the Gabonese electorate (92%), the administration of the voting booths was effective, and the ballots were counted efficiently and fairly. General Oligui Nguema has announced his candidacy for the presidency, and there is every reason to believe that presidential and legislative elections will also be held according to the promised timeframe of August 2025. The conduct and outcome of these elections will be a decisive test of democratic institutions.

The ensemble of democratic institutions that previously existed in Gabon was dissolved immediately after the coup of August 2023. Neither General Oligui Nguema's personal rise to power through the coup d'état nor his appointment of politicians to the parliament and government in October that year conforms to any conventional principle of democracy. Following the prescribed procedural order for democratic transition, Oligui held consultations and a referendum on a new constitution before holding elections to determine who would govern. Gabon currently operates as an authoritarian, though civilianized, military regime that has pledged to transition to democracy. The transitional period before democratic elections has been set at 24 months, with the possibility of an extension. While the military government has announced presidential and legislative elections for August 2025, challenges remain. The fact that General Oligui Nguema announced his own candidacy for the presidential elections in January 2025 raises questions about whether those elections will be fair and free. The new constitution of 2024 explicitly allows him to do so and he still enjoys widespread popularity for being credited with overthrowing the Bongo dynasty. However, if the transition culminates merely in the junta leader exchanging his general's uniform for the suit and tie of a civilian president, then the legitimacy of the elections must be carefully scrutinized by objective external observers to determine whether they were fair and free.

Commitment to
democratic
institutions

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5 | Political and Social Integration

For 56 years, the Bongo dynasty ruled through a single party, the Gabonese Democratic Party (Parti Démocratique Gabonais, PDG) – initially as a de jure one-party regime, then later – following the 1991 constitutional reform that introduced multiparty politics – through a hegemonic party system. The ruling PDG maintained control over the presidency, the National Assembly, the Senate, and most local and regional governments. From the 1960s, the PDG monopolized the executive branch, leaving little opportunity for the opposition to gain power through elections.

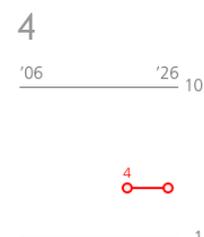
After the August 2023 coup, both the Bongo dynasty and the ruling PDG were removed from power by force, and the hegemonic party system was brought to an end. Although many longtime PDG politicians have been appointed to the transitional government – for example, Prime Minister Raymond Ndong Sima – they will be barred from contesting elections for three years if the new constitution passes in November 2024.

Under Bongo, the party system was highly volatile except for PDG’s hegemony. Opposition politicians regularly crossed over to the presidential majority and vice versa. The system resembled a game of musical chairs, with important elites rotating in and out of positions of power. Parties lacked clearly defined ideologies and showed little cohesion or accountability to voters. The coup marks another reshuffling of the party system, this time favoring the former opposition. So far, there has been no deepening of the programmatic profiles of political parties. It is also noteworthy that political parties themselves are not banned by the military junta.

Gabon’s opposition was divided over a measure proposed at the country’s National Dialogue to suspend nearly 200 political parties until further notice and bar members of the ousted PDG from taking part in elections for three years. Supporters of the measure said it would eliminate parties that exist mainly for corruption or personal gain, preventing alleged vote-buying by former PDG officials. Opponents said it would stifle democracy.

In Article 3 of the new constitution, the controversial proposition appears to have been dropped: “National sovereignty belongs to the people who exercise it directly, through referendum or by election, according to the principle of pluralist democracy and indirectly by the constitutional institutions.” More specifically, Article 21 states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of association. The right to form associations, political parties or groups, unions, companies, establishments of social interest as well as religious communities, and is guaranteed to all under the conditions established by law; religious communities regulate and administer their affairs independently, provided they respect the principles of national sovereignty, public order, and the preservation of moral integrity and the mentality of the individual.

Party system



However, the same article also appears to reflect a recommendation from the National Dialogue, stating: “Associations, political parties or groups, unions, companies, establishments of social interest, as well as religious communities whose activities are contrary to the laws, the Gabonese Constitution, or the good understanding of ethnic groups may be prohibited in accordance with the law.”

Once the 2024 constitution is enacted, political parties will be allowed but will remain subject to state regulation, respecting the principles of sovereignty, public order and the preservation of moral integrity. These broad terms may be used to dissolve parties deemed dangerous to a tyrant or a newly dominant party in government.

NGOs have only limited influence, although they have had some impact on transparency in the extractive sector. NGO campaigns contributed to Gabon rejoining the international transparency initiative Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2021.

Active civic engagement remains limited, however. In the 2024 Afrobarometer, nearly 90% of respondents reported that they had not joined others in their community to demand government action in the previous 12 months. Similarly, 87% of respondents reported that they had not participated in a demonstration or protest march.

At the same time, civil society organizations have limited influence. NGOs achieved one major success in 2024. Their invitation to the National Dialogue by General Brice Oligui Nguema in April 2024 allowed them to express numerous concerns and present nearly 1,000 proposals for the new constitution. This concrete involvement in the constitutional drafting represented real progress. Generally, churches and religious leaders have gained some influence under Oligui.

For round 10 of the Afrobarometer survey in Gabon, the national partner Center for Studies and Research in Political and Prospective Geosciences surveyed 1,200 Gabonese adults between April and May 2024. The survey found a decline in support for democracy between 2021 and 2024, with the proportion of respondents rejecting dictatorship falling from around 90% to 72%, rejecting one-party rule falling from 89% to 84% and rejecting military rule falling from 70% to 20%. Over the same period, however, the proportion of respondents preferring democracy over other forms of government remained stable at 60%.

Data from Afrobarometer surveys conducted shortly before the presidential elections that led to the August 2023 coup d'état reveal that Gabonese citizens broadly favor democracy over other forms of governance and support choosing leaders through popular elections. However, many express skepticism about whether such processes enable them to hold leaders accountable when expectations are not met. While they

Interest groups

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Approval of democracy

n/a

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n/a

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generally supported democratic elections, the 56-year rule of the Bongo dynasty and the ruling Parti Démocratique Gabonais (PDG) has eroded people's faith in the effectiveness of elections in Gabon.

In an Afrobarometer poll conducted on October 10, 2023, an overwhelming majority affirmed that Gabon “is not a democracy” or is “a democracy with major problems” and deplored the way democracy is practiced in the country. Many respondents reported that they were against military governments but deemed it legitimate for the army to take over the country if elected leaders abuse their power for their own interests.

Generally, the extent of social capital is relatively weak. According to UK-based NGO Explorer, 81 UK-registered NGOs are currently operating in the country, with 152 active activities, 745 completed activities and three planned projects. Of these organizations, 51 report through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

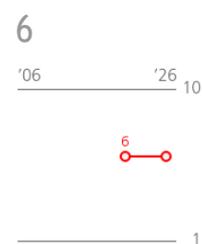
These NGOs have only limited influence, although they have had some impact on transparency in the extractive sector. NGO campaigns contributed to Gabon's decision to rejoin the international transparency initiative EITI.

Overall, active civic engagement remains limited. In the 2021 round of the Afrobarometer, 27% of respondents reported that they had not participated in a community meeting over the past year, while 43% reported that they would have if given the opportunity and only 30% of respondents reported that they had. In addition, 58% of respondents reported that they had not participated in a protest, while 33% reported that they would have if given the opportunity. Regarding trust, 58% of respondents reported that they trusted their neighbors, 48% reported that they trusted other people they knew, 58% that they trusted people from other religions and 64% that they trusted people from other ethnic groups.

According to an Afrobarometer survey conducted on September 9, 2022, a large majority of Gabonese citizens expressed disapproval in the performance of local elected officials and reported low levels of confidence in them. More than half of citizens think such officials are involved in corruption and are never willing to listen to ordinary people. Given this widespread distrust in the former one-party system and the Ali Bongo dynasty, the military was able to win popular support and backing from the political opposition for its coup.

As part of efforts to engage civil society in the transitional process, the military junta convened a national dialogue in April 2024, inviting more than 600 participants from civil society, both secular and religious, to deliberate on Gabon's challenges, propose solutions and outline a new constitutional framework. Elected military officials, politicians, civil society members, youth leaders, traditional rulers and members of the clergy took part in this national dialogue, which was widely praised by international observers and organizations, including the Catholic Church. The

Social capital



dialogue resulted in nearly 1,000 recommendations, which were submitted to the junta on April 30, 2024, and served as the basis for drafting the new constitution, which was presented in a referendum on November 16, 2024. In this regard, civil society organizations were given a real voice in the country's future order.

II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Despite an above-average GDP per capita of \$8,420 (2023), economic growth has declined and Gabon continues to face significant income inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 38.8 in 2017, the last year for which inequality was measured this way. Gender inequality also remains a concern, as indicated by the country's Gender Inequality Index score of 0.51 in 2023. On the African Gender Index, however, Gabon achieved the largest reported improvement in Africa, increasing its score from 0.456 in 2019 to 0.651 in 2023 (+0.195). Compared to countries with similar incomes, Gabon performs relatively poorly on both the Human Development Index and the Human Capital Index. Gabon's HDI rank is 123rd out of 191 countries included in the UNDP Human Development Index for 2024. Its Inequality-adjusted HDI, which measures the loss in human development due to inequality, showed a 24.1% reduction, lowering its adjusted HDI score to 0.526 in 2022. Slower growth in 2023 and insufficient job creation have increased poverty. The share of Gabonese living under \$6.85 per day (in 2017 PPP) is estimated to have reached 35% in 2023, with 855,000 people living in extreme poverty. More than half (51%) of Gabon's population self-identifies as poor, highlighting unmet aspirations for improved living conditions. In rural areas, over half of residents live in poverty and their poverty is three times more severe than that of the urban poor.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	19444.9	20440.7	20055.7	20867.0
GDP growth	%	1.5	3.0	2.4	3.4
Inflation (CPI)	%	1.1	4.2	3.6	1.2
Unemployment	%	21.2	20.4	20.3	20.1
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	7.9	5.4	5.7	5.5
Export growth	%	12.8	12.9	-2.5	4.0
Import growth	%	17.4	12.5	1.3	6.8
Current account balance	\$ M	-	-	-	-

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
Public debt	% of GDP	72.9	65.6	70.6	72.7
External debt	\$ M	7833.7	7997.4	7588.1	-
Total debt service	\$ M	1149.8	578.5	1165.8	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-1.5	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	9.5	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	11.8	10.8	11.8	12.2
Public education spending	% of GDP	2.7	2.2	2.3	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.6	1.8	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	1.5	1.3	1.2	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Since gaining political independence, Gabon has operated as a free market capitalist economy, welcoming foreign investors with open arms. This commitment has remained following the August 2023 coup, as the military junta – the “transitional government” – seeks to retain foreign direct investment.

If foreign companies have a permanent establishment in Gabon, they are required to pay taxes as local companies. The standard corporate income tax rate is 30%. A rate of 35% applies to oil and mining companies, while a reduced rate of 25% applies to companies holding intellectual property rights, qualified real estate companies developing urban land and low-rent housing, qualifying tourism companies and public institutions.

The size of the informal economy is substantial, although it may be below the sub-Saharan standard. While official data for 2024 is not available, the most recent figure reflects an increase from 48.7% in 2019 to 49.7% in 2020.

Since March 15, 2017, a special solidarity contribution has been introduced at a rate of 1% on the turnover of all companies that generate taxable income, excluding VAT, above XAF 30 million (\$48,665) per year. Initially non-deductible, the Gabon government has since agreed to make the special solidarity contribution (CSS)

Market organization

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deductible for corporate tax purposes. Concessions for valuable natural resources, which represent the primary economic activity, often involve corrupt payments to government officials and a bidding process that lacks transparency. Since the 2023 coup, the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions (CTRI) has promised to tackle corruption, but – without any independent bodies capable of holding the military junta to account – it may be a case of the fox guarding the hens.

Gabonese antitrust law is based on Loi n° 14/1998 of July 23, 1998, which establishes the competition regime (Arts. 1–2), prohibits collective anti-competitive practices (Arts. 7–11) and individual anti-competitive practices (Arts. 12–23), requires transparency in commercial transactions (Arts. 24–32), defines powers of investigation (Arts. 42–56) and establishes criminal penalties (Arts. 57–59). The 2024 constitution contains no additional provisions to prevent monopolistic structures or conduct. There are no new specific ministries in charge of reviewing transactions or competition-related concerns; that responsibility remains with the ministry that is party to each contract.

As Gabon transformed into an oil-rich rentier state, nationalized its primary sectors and experienced a decline in the influence of its former colonial power France, traditional French colonial monopolies were replaced by national champions and new foreign actors. These outsiders from the United States, China, South Korea, Singapore, Egypt, Lebanon and Türkiye entered Gabon to make competitive investments.

Despite its laws, the Gabonese state has established monopolies in several sectors. For example, water and power production and distribution were previously monopolized by the Société d'énergie et d'eau du Gabon (SEEG), a subsidiary of the Veolia Water group. However, in 2024, the military junta suspended this concession due to the company's failure to provide safe drinking water. Elsewhere, the state timber firm the Société Nationale Des Bois Du Gabon (SNBG) has a monopoly over the marketing of ozigo and okoume logs. No longer private, SNBG was re-nationalized and became the property of the Gabonese state again on December 30, 2024.

Additionally, La Société des ciments du Gabon (CIMGABON) holds the monopoly on cement imports. However, after a steep drop in sales following the 2023 coup and facing competition from imported cement producers, the company has ceased paying its suppliers and service providers.

Although Gabon is not a member of the International Competition Network, its membership of the regional organization Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) subjects it to competition law regulations in cases where abuses of dominant position or cartel behavior have a regional Central African dimension – that is, when they involve legal entities registered and based within the

Competition policy

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CEMAC region. According to CEMAC regulations, individuals and entities involved in the abuse of a dominant position or cartel behaviors may be subject to imprisonment and fines.

A postcolonial economy heavily reliant on trade and historically embedded within the French sphere of influence, Gabon has been a member of the WTO since January 1, 1995. Foreign trade is now primarily liberalized, although some constraints persist. Some products, such as soap, cooking oils and flour, are heavily taxed to protect domestic production. However, most of Gabon's trade is in oil, mining and forestry.

There are some barriers in the petroleum sector. Labor laws mandate that 80% of a firm's workforce must be hired locally. While this law has not always been enforced, there is heavy pressure from labor unions to apply it in the oil sector and labor disputes are frequent. Gabon's labor code is heavily skewed in favor of workers, and termination can be an arduous and costly endeavor. Labor disputes can effectively stall operations for even large firms for indefinite periods.

One notable non-tariff barrier was the 2009 government prohibition on the export of untreated wood and raw timber. This was implemented to support local production of wood products and to encourage the development of a wood-based manufacturing sector. Local value-added production transforms 69% of Gabonese wood.

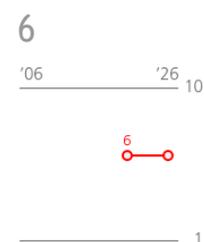
Gabon has created several major foreign trade zones, free ports and trade facilitation initiatives. The most notable examples are the special economic zone (SEZ) at Nkok, which offers tax and customs incentives to attract foreign investors, and the New Owendo International Port. Following the success of Nkok, three new SEZs have been created at Lambarene, Franceville and Port-Gentil. However, since August 2023, no new developments have been made.

The Gabonese banking sector consists of 10 institutions. Three of these dominate the market, representing nearly 70% of total assets. The Bongo dynasty implemented a financial inclusion strategy for 2022 – 2027 to improve access to financial services for

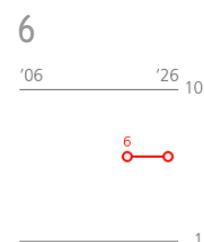
vulnerable populations and to promote digital finance. As of 2021, the most recent available data, two-thirds of the population aged 15 and older held an account with a financial institution or mobile money provider.

Bank capitalization is deteriorating, but the equity weighted assets ratio, at 14.5% in 2023, remains below the 17% minimum required by the BEAC. The capital-to-asset ratio stood at 9.1% in 2022, according to the World Bank. Three public banks are currently undergoing restructuring. Two banks are in the process of liquidation, as of 2024. The level of non-performing loans is moderate, around 7.5%, and stable. Gabonese banks are exposed to sovereign risk, with public debt securities accounting for approximately one-third of the country's banking assets.

Liberalization of
foreign trade



Banking system



The banking sector is open to foreign institutions and foreign banks are allowed to establish operations in the country. One U.S. bank, Citigroup, is present in Gabon. There are no restrictions on foreigners opening bank accounts. However, the banking sector remains highly concentrated, with three of the largest Gabonese banks accounting for 77% of all loans and deposits. Access to banking services outside major cities is limited.

Gabon's banking system includes one development bank, the Gabonese Development Bank (BGD), and five main commercial banks. The International Gabonese and French Bank (BGFI) is the principal commercial bank in Gabon and the largest financial group in the CEMAC zone. Commercial banks – such as BGFI, Citibank and EcoBank – offer most corporate banking services or can procure them from overseas. Local credit to the private sector is limited and expensive, but it is available to both foreign and local investors on equal terms. The country's main economic actors, the oil companies, finance themselves outside Gabon.

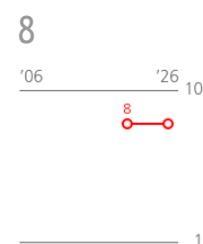
Five banks dominated loans in 2023. BGFI Bank Gabon retained first place with 37%, followed by Orabank Gabon (17.7%), UGB (17.7%), Citibank Gabon (14.5%) and BICIG (10%).

The national microfinance landscape consists of 20 establishments, including six savings and loan cooperatives, and 13 limited public companies. Four main institutions – Finam, Loxia, EDG and Express-Union – dominate the sector, accounting for nearly 95% of customers. Gabon's microfinance sector is characterized by a strong emphasis on short-term deposits.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

The Central African CFA franc of the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA), known as the “céfa,” was established by France after World War II as a currency for its African colonies. The Central African CFA franc is an African currency pegged to the euro, meaning the exchange rate of Gabon's currency remains fixed in relation to the euro, regardless of fluctuations in the euro's value. In 2020, France revised its monetary agreement with the six member states of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale, CEMAC), of which Gabon is a member. As a result, the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) is no longer required to deposit half its foreign exchange reserves with the Bank of France. The law also mandates France's withdrawal from the monetary bloc's governing bodies, such as the BEAC. This has increased the independence of the bank and the monetary zone from French influence. Now, only the BEAC is responsible for issuing and managing the Central African CFA franc used in Gabon. Since the August 2023 coup, the military junta has not questioned Gabon's continued use of the Central African CFA franc, as other military juntas in francophone Africa have. The exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the Central

Monetary stability



African CFA franc remained almost perfectly stable, with \$1 worth XAF 630 on average in 2023 and only rising to XAF 631 on average in 2024. This stability has been beneficial in controlling inflation. Gabon's inflation rate actually decreased by year-end, from 0.80% in November 2024 to 0.70% in December of the same year, remaining below 1%.

Since the August 2023 coup, the military junta has faced pressure from international lenders to rein in its fiscal deficits and balance the government budget. General Brice Oligui Nguema and members of the military junta that came to power with him have attempted to inform themselves about the budget, to the extent that soldiers can, and have expressed a desire to improve public finances. Debt declined from 71% of GDP in 2023 to 67% in 2024 driven by external debt repayments and strong nominal GDP growth. However, ratings agencies expect a renewed rise in 2025 (71%) and 2026 (72%) due to lower nominal oil revenues and wider budget deficits.

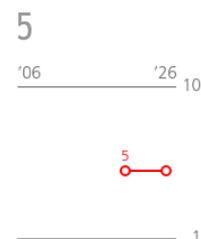
In August 2024, the budget increased to XAF 4,493.4 billion (\$7.15 billion) from XAF 4,162 billion (\$6.63 billion) in 2023, an increase of XAF 331.4 billion (\$0.53 billion) over the year. To finance this budget increase, the Gabonese state intends to borrow more. In this context, an increase of XAF 196.2 billion (\$310 million) in cash and financing resources is planned for 2025 through issuing public securities.

The national debt in Gabon is forecast to continuously increase between 2024 and 2029 by \$8.5 billion (up 55.85%). For the 10th consecutive year of increases, the national debt is estimated to reach \$23.74 billion by 2029, setting a new peak.

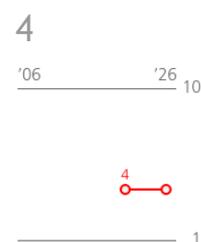
9 | Private Property

Ever since independence, Gabon has been a capitalist country with laws supporting private and commercial property. Current laws do not impose any restrictions on nationality for possessing or owning property in Gabon. Foreigners who wish to lease or acquire property can do so in accordance with the law. However, Gabon performs poorly on the Global Property Index, which assesses the extent to which laws safeguard private property rights and the government enforces those laws. In 2024, Gabon's International Property Rights Index (IPRI) score decreased by 0.054 points to 3.763, ranking Gabon 15th in the Africa region and 104th in the world. One domain where private ownership of property is relatively weak is real property. The state is the primary landowner in Gabon, controlling up to 90% of its territory, which is oxymoronically classified as "private government land." The majority of the population lacks formal landownership and is instead considered to be occupants and users of government property. Traditional land and resource rights are not upheld, and the avenues available for secure land tenure are limited and inaccessible to most people due to procedural constraints.

Fiscal stability



Property rights



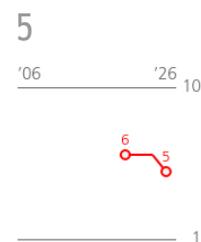
Urban and peri-urban populations are especially vulnerable to forced evictions carried out by the state, often without fair compensation and sometimes for questionable “public purposes.” Rural populations are often displaced to make way for foreign concession activities. The current land tenure system favors privileged elites and transnational interests backed by participating foreign governments.

Since the August 2023 coup, the transitional government has attempted to recover funds illegally acquired by members of the Bongo dynasty. About \$10 billion in an account belonging to former ruler Ali Bongo was requisitioned from BGF bank by the public prosecutor and transferred to an account attributed to the Republican Guard, which staged the coup. Regarding foreign accounts, the junta seized one offshore account belonging to Ali Bongo’s son Nouredin Bongo, who had placed his funds in a bank in Dubai. He and his mother remain under house arrest while the regime attempts to recover the vast offshore fortune pillaged from the public treasury by the Bongo dynasty.

Gabon promotes foreign investment and, relatedly, the involvement of foreign private companies across a range of sectors, particularly oil and gas, infrastructure, timber, ecotourism and mining. Large foreign private companies such as Olam (Singapore), Shell (UK-Netherlands), Total (France-Belgium), Maersk (Denmark), Canal+ (France), DHL (Germany) and Bharti Airtel (India) have enjoyed substantial protections. Several business incubators active in the country facilitate private business activities. Through the creation of new economic zones, Gabon attracts foreign investment with temporary tax exemptions in its forestry, minerals and agricultural sectors.

Private companies are seen as vital drivers of economic prosperity but lack sufficient legal protections. Since seizing power in a coup in August 2023, the transitional regime has nationalized some private companies. On July 1, 2024, transitional President General Brice Oligui Nguema marked the nationalization of the oil company Assala Energy. Formerly owned by the American investment fund Carlyle, Assala is now part of the public company Gabon Oil Company (GOC). As the country’s second largest oil producer, Assala was acquired through a controversial sales agreement with the French company Maurel & Prom in August 2023, before the Gabonese state exercised its right of pre-emption and acquired the firm for \$1.3 billion. To finance the purchase, the state took out a loan from the Swiss fund Gunvor.

Private enterprise



10 | Welfare Regime

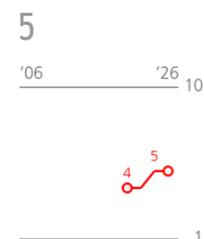
Generally, social safety nets are quite rudimentary, encompassing various vulnerable groups, including the elderly. However, Gabon's average level of health care infrastructure is relatively high compared to the rest of Africa, and its social security structure is more developed. There are three main programs: the National Social Security Fund (CNSS), the Pension and Family Benefit Fund (CPPF), and the National Health Insurance and Social Guarantee Fund (CNAMGS). After years of extensive corruption by the Bongo dynasty and ruling elites, these funds have been seriously depleted and, according to the French Development Agency, now face severe shortcomings. This includes a large number of untreated Gabonese still in need of care and the inadequate distribution of medicines in pharmacies. For example, after months of unpaid bills by CNAMGS, pharmacy managers suspended services in 2024. Every day in Libreville, retirees queue for hours to claim pensions from the CNSS, which in some cases have not been paid for years. Employers are demanding privatization of social security due to the ruinous pillaging of the funds by the Bongo dynasty and members of the ruling elite.

Legally, equality of opportunity has been achieved, though with limitations. Significant progress has been made in recent years regarding the rights of women and gender equality. In March 2021, the government enacted a bill amending the civil code aimed at promoting gender equality. Among other provisions, women are now able to open bank accounts and work without their husbands' permission. Consequently, Gabon's score on the Women, Business and the Law 2024 index has increased substantially. Gabon scores 95.0 out of 100.0. The overall score for Gabon is higher than the regional average observed across sub-Saharan Africa (74.0). Gabon has long failed to report educational figures to UNESCO. In 2018, the literacy rate for both men (85.9%) and women (83.4%) was reported as nearly equal. However, progress up the educational ladder is not as favorable for women as for men. The ratio of women to men in primary education was an excellent 1.0, whereas in higher education it was only 0.6.

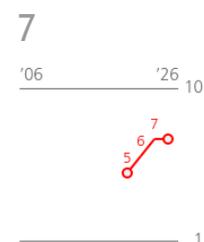
There is little religious discrimination in Gabon, and none of the Islamic extremism found in some countries to the north. Freedom of religion is protected by law and in practice. Ethnic discrimination is not widespread either, as Gabon's multiethnic society lacks a dominant national ethnicity that could persecute others. Transitional President General Brice Oligui Nguema derives from an ethnic minority, the Téké, on his mother's side and from the country's largest ethnic group, the Fang, on his father's side.

For decades, the previous regime relied on cynical ethnic patronage and clientelism toward "big men" from each ethnic group, following a regional electoral strategy known in Gabon as "géopolitique." Nevertheless, the major inequalities in Gabon can

Social safety nets



Equal opportunity



be described as regional. The northern provinces of Ogooué-Ivindo and Woleu-Ntem are the poorest. These areas are predominantly rural, with few cities at incipient levels of urbanization, and tend to have a sparse population comprised mostly of members of the largest ethnic group, the Fang. Northern Fang communities lack basic services and infrastructure and must contend with various natural barriers. The southern provinces, such as Ngounié and Nyanga, also lag behind but have more intermediate-urbanized cities where a greater number of poor people live. Low performance is evident in nutrition and basic medical care, health and wellness, access to services, housing affordability, personal rights and access to advanced education, where minimal progress has been made over time. In 2019, Gabon revised its Penal Code to criminalize homosexual relations between consenting adults. Since the implementation of the new 2024 constitution, there are now provisions that explicitly discriminate against same-sex couples, declaring that marriage can only be between a man and a woman.

11 | Economic Performance

The country is rich in natural resources such as timber, manganese and oil. With a small population and abundant natural resources, Gabon's national income figures have been relatively high for decades. The World Bank reported that per capita GDP was \$21,947 in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms in 2023, representing an 11% increase over the previous two years. Meanwhile, GDP reached \$21.013 billion in 2024, up from \$15.317 billion in 2020 – the worst year during the COVID-19-induced economic crisis.

But not all the news is good. Inflation has risen, as it has worldwide, with the latest available figures showing it reached 3.6% in 2023. Meanwhile, unemployment topped 20% in 2023. Furthermore, domestic taxes dropped to 11% of state revenues and public debt swelled during the catastrophic presidential terms of Ali Bongo (2009–23), rising from around 20% to 72.1% of GDP in 2023.

This increase in public debt was primarily caused by failures in taxation, extensive spending on the Gabon Emergent Development Program and widespread corruption at all levels of public administration during the Ali Bongo era. Servicing this debt has required the transitional government to allocate larger portions of public revenue, which hinders the country's potential to become an emerging economy.

Output strength

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12 | Sustainability

Gabon is becoming an environmentally sustainable emerging economy through initiatives in areas such as environmental protection and ecotourism, which led to the establishment of a network of national parks in 2002 covering 30,000 square kilometers or 11% of the country's territory.

Gabon has a strong Ministry of the Environment, overseen by a National Agency responsible for managing its 15 natural parks. In June 2019, Lee White, a British zoologist and botanist born in Uganda, renowned for his work on large mammals and the African forest in Gabon and as one of the founders of Gabon's national parks, was appointed minister of water and forests, the sea and the environment. After the August 2023 coup, the new transitional government pursued the "Gabonization" of all public ministries, and Lee White, a naturalized foreigner, had to resign his post and left the country. Arrested by the B2 military intelligence in September 2023, he was accused of the illegal allocation of forestry permits, misappropriation of public funds and destruction of official documents.

Despite the government's promise of significant progress in ecotourism, this industry has not yet materialized. As a result, Gabon's natural reserves are facing a complex situation. On one hand, local rural communities that rely on traditional sources of livelihood such as hunting and farming have been deprived. On the other hand, foreign corporations from Europe and Asia have been granted concessions to exploit mining operations and establish palm oil plantations.

Despite these challenges, Gabon is internationally recognized as a global leader in climate action. Its strong environmental preservation measures and long-standing political dedication to conserving the country's pristine natural environment make it perhaps the most carbon-positive country in the world. Gabon acts as a net absorber of carbon emissions, emitting minimal amounts while significantly absorbing carbon.

In January 2025, President Oligui Nguema outlined an environmental pact, one of his administration's three main priorities. To strengthen the country's commitments under the Paris Agreement, the government announced measures to develop a national carbon registry and impose a levy on greenhouse gas emissions from aviation and maritime shipping.

Environmental
policy

7

'06 _____ '26 10



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The education sector remains a strategic priority in the transitional government's 2025 budget, with a total allocation of \$280 million (XAF 177.55 billion) – an increase of \$14 million (XAF 8.82 billion) compared to the previous financial year. Education spending amounted to 2.2% of GDP in 2022. This funding reflects a commitment to improving access to education, particularly for the poor, and strengthening school infrastructure, while focusing on teacher training.

The main problem with evaluating education in Gabon is the lack of data reported to international bodies. The most recent comprehensive collection of statistical data occurred in the 2012/13 academic year, but the results of this data have never been published. On August 9, 2018, a coordinated program was signed between the United Nations and the Ministry of Education to support the production of basic statistical data. This program was the result of collaborative efforts by UNICEF, UNESCO and the U.N. Population Fund. Due to the lack of up-to-date data, it is impossible to critically address the educational situation in Gabon, especially considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced school closures and hindered educational achievements in already underfunded and understaffed public sector schools.

According to estimates published by UNESCO, the overall literacy rate in 2018 was 89.8%, with 88.1% for men and 91.4% for women. It fell to 85.7% in 2022, the last year for which figures are available. Since August 2023, no new educational figures have been reported. Information regarding research and development expenditure is also currently unavailable.

Education policy /
R&D

5



Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

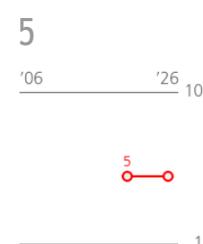
The country's location on the west coast of Central Africa has long provided it with a geographical advantage for trade with the Atlantic world, and its abundant natural resources remain a significant economic opportunity for development. However, extreme poverty among the population, largely resulting from the corrupt accumulation of wealth by a small elite, continues to be a structural barrier, as do the severe infrastructural deficiencies. Most of the country's territory – covered by rainforest – remains inaccessible due to a lack of roads. The Road Network Development Program built three roads: Fougamou–Mouila, La Leyou–Lastoursville and Ndendé–Lébamba. The Fougamou–Mouila–Ndendé–Doussala section (Congo–Brazzaville border) is an important link in the Ndjamená–Yaoundé–Brazzaville road corridor, selected as one of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD's) priority projects. Most economic growth is driven by extractive industries that produce goods for export. Because the government has failed to provide statistics to the World Bank, it is impossible to provide an exact percentage of the labor force with education, but, overall, the level is low by international standards, especially in technical training for blue-collar industrial jobs. The rentier mentality has also disrupted the connection between work and reward, making manual labor undesirable for most Gabonese, who aspire to high-paying government jobs in the capital city – an aspiration that does not align with Gabon's actual development needs.

Generally, the traditions of civil society are weak.

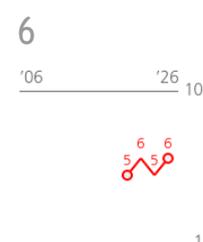
Bridging and bonding social capital are relatively high, as individuals are part of extensive social and especially kinship relations, from which obligations and a social support structure arise. At the same time, these networks span ethnic groups and connect people of different origins to the Gabonese national identity.

Yet, civil society organizations have limited influence. After nearly a decade away from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which Gabon left in 2013, the country returned to the EITI in 2021 – the global standard for good governance of oil, gas and mining. The civil society anti-corruption NGO Publish What You Pay Gabon played a crucial role in this process by forming a coalition of civil society actors and insisting that access to International Monetary Fund (IMF) funds be conditioned on Gabon's return to the EITI. However, despite this apparent achievement, government corruption in the oil sector, lack of transparency and

Structural
constraints



Civil society
traditions



unaccountability meant that the Bongo dynasty – until it was toppled by a coup d'état in 2023 – illegally embezzled the lion's share of wealth from the extractive industries sector.

In the spring of 2024, the new transitional government under General Oligui Nguema invited civil society to participate in a national dialogue to draft a new constitution. The Inclusive National Dialogue brought together more than 600 participants to debate the terms of the constitution. The massive turnout of politicians, civil society members, youth leaders, traditional rulers, clergy and people living with disabilities underscored the extent to which Gabonese citizens want to express themselves freely and without fear of harassment. The dialogue produced nearly 1,000 recommendations, many of which were incorporated by the transitional regime into the draft constitution. The constitution passed with a large majority in a November 2024 referendum. However, some civil society organizations hold the view that the transition process was not inclusive and that some of the recommendations made during the Inclusive National Dialogue have not been considered by the transition authority.

In 2024, Gabon received a Global Peace Index (GPI) score of 2.32, ranking it in the middle of sub-Saharan African states. In a Central African region plagued by prolonged social conflicts and wars, Gabon has long been considered a haven of peace. However, in the 2024 GPI, Gabon recorded the largest deterioration in peacefulness of any sub-Saharan African state and third-largest deterioration of any country worldwide. The decline in peacefulness was driven by increasing internal unrest, which culminated in the August 2023 military coup that overturned the results of the previous presidential election. The international community, including the African Union and the United Nations, condemned the coup, and called for a peaceful resolution and a return to constitutional governance.

On the other hand, no violent incidents based on social, ethnic or religious differences occurred during the period under review. The state, most importantly, has a monopoly on the use of violence. No rebel movements or international terrorist organizations operate in the country. However, violent crime and ritual killings remain serious concerns in Gabon. Non-citizen African immigrants, who constitute a significant portion of the population, are subjected to harassment and extortion, including by the police. Some minority groups reportedly face workplace discrimination and live in extreme poverty. However, none of these groups have attempted to mobilize themselves into any form of collective action resembling a guerrilla force, insurrection or secessionist movement.

Conflict intensity

2

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II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

For 14 years, Ali Bongo's "Gabon Emergent" strategic development plan promised to transform Gabon into an "emerging" country in less than a generation. As a comprehensive development strategy outlining the orientations and programs necessary to achieve this emergence, the plan focused on three main themes: promoting economic growth by diversifying the economy away from raw material exports and toward value-added production, implementing government policies to reduce poverty and ensuring the sustainable development of natural resources. A dramatic decline in world commodity prices in 2014, including Gabon's key exports of oil, manganese and timber, demonstrated the soundness of pursuing a strategy of diversifying economic development away from extractive industries and raw materials. However, the collapse of oil prices in 2014 and declining oil production reduced available financing for the plan's second phase (2016 – 2020) and caused public debt to more than double. The Gabon Emergent plan was replaced by the Transformation Acceleration Plan, with 20 selected projects, including optimization in the oil and gas sectors, upstream forest consolidation, tuna fishing, land and educational reforms, vocational training centers, upgrading primary health care, acceleration of investments in the energy and water sectors, and digital infrastructure and priority road programs. However, this new plan was thwarted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

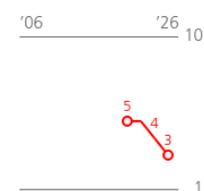
After Ali Bongo's stroke, First Lady Sylvia Bongo and her eldest son Nouredin took control of the palace, and intensified the corrupt embezzlement and misappropriation of vast sums of resource rents into a network of offshore tax havens, leaving many projects incomplete and inadequately funded.

When the presidential guard staged a coup in August 2023, initial efforts by the junta to take control of public resources were uncoordinated, amid transport disruptions that impacted the wood and manganese industries, rising spending to meet social demands and declining oil revenues. A new transitional cabinet, filled with ministers often drawn from the previous regime, temporarily halted the poor governance expected of military leaders but did not manage to establish a plan for development going forward.

Question
Score

Prioritization

3



The new transitional government under General Brice Oligui Nguema and members of the Republican Guard, assisted by civilian ministers, many of whom had served in the previous Bongo dynasty, has attempted to maintain development programs, keep government services operational, and finance the budget with resource rents and external borrowing. The transitional government’s policy ambitions have been very limited, given the enormous constraints the country faces. With public debt representing 70% of GDP, there is little money to pursue the ambitious programs that Ali Bongo attempted under “Gabon Emergent.” Instead, President Oligui Nguema has delivered speeches committing to expanding technological and digital access, and developing Gabon’s oil and gas, minerals, and renewable energy industries. However, there are few concrete public policies by which to evaluate the government’s ability to implement these broad agendas.

With regard to the political system, some of the core promises of the CTRI – national dialogue and constitutional reform – are being delivered. The quality of these achievements should be evaluated against the political lethargy of the last few years of the Bongo regime. At least, the country is seeing political change for the first time and – despite all reservations about a military regime – this is no small achievement for Gabon.

Since August 2023, the military junta has denounced the practices of the Bongo dynasty, placing members of the previous regime under house arrest and investigating their criminal misuse of public funds – often in collaboration with foreign actors. Insofar as the delegitimation of the past represents a critical moment for potential reflection, the government claims to have “learned” of previous policies that facilitated the diversion of resource rents into offshore fiscal paradises and anonymous beneficiary trusts in the Global North. However, as the military lacks the technical expertise to manage an economy dependent on a complex extractive industry, it has rhetorically adopted the National Development Plan of the Transition (2024 – 2026), which includes extensive public spending on popular social programs, and has initiated a political dialogue with stakeholders, hoping to reform the country’s political, economic and social institutions. For now, the new development plan rests on five pillars: political and institutional reforms, development of strategic infrastructure, intensification of economic diversification, development of human capital and social inclusion, and environmental sustainability and climate change resilience. If its recommendations are implemented by the military leadership, the dialogue may signal a willingness to learn from civilian policy expertise.

Implementation

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Policy learning

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'06 _____ '26 10



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15 | Resource Efficiency

Public administration in Gabon is costly compared to the limited benefits it provides to the people. The high expense is largely due to lavish spending by ruling elites, who consume most of the government's revenue while leaving citizens in poverty and often demand bribes for basic public services. This situation has persisted following the August 2023 military coup.

Several politically motivated dismissals, disguised as anti-corruption campaigns, have resulted in the loss of experienced directors and agency managers. The departure of experienced officials, such as former Environment Minister Lee White, underscores the need for new appointments capable of matching the previous levels of competency. Recruitment processes have often been influenced by xenophobia both within the presidency and the ministries, reflecting the military junta's dissatisfaction with the influence previously held by non-Gabonese nationals in Ali Bongo's so-called foreign legion. Since coming to power by coup d'état, the government has yet to achieve a balanced budget, while Gabon's public debt has more than tripled in size since 2012. This increase is due to irresponsible borrowing by Ali Bongo to finance his "Gabon Emergent" development agenda. However, there is little suggestion that it will be reined in by this civilianized military regime, especially as its legitimacy will depend on public spending on social programs. The state security forces appear to be the only functioning entity, although they have so far pursued a return to civilian rule. Much of their energy has focused on fiscal deficits and attempting to assure international creditors that Gabon can meet its heavy debt burden.

The previous government was able to reconcile conflicting interests only through distributional politics. Problem-solving took the form of clientelistic distribution of resource rents. Coordination of government was handed to a series of all-powerful courtiers who were opaquely transformed into super-ministers. Each of these influential courtiers became entangled in scandal and eventually targeted by anti-corruption investigations. Following Ali Bongo's stroke, First Lady Sylvia Bongo and her eldest son Nouredin captured power and dismissed competent ministers who were willing to challenge their systematic pillaging of public revenues.

The 2023 coup brought to power a faction within the military, the Republican Guard, centered around General Brice Oligui Nguema, who hand-picked the new National Assembly, Senate, Constitutional Court and Cabinet of Ministers, including the prime minister. In the sense that concentrating all three branches of government in the hands of one man reduces conflicting policy objectives, one could argue that the transitional government is successfully coordinating. But to the extent that successful coordination of policy objectives requires that policies do not thwart or damage each other, the increase in government spending, combined with assurances to

Efficient use of assets

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Policy coordination

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international creditors that Gabon can meet its debt payments currently in arrears, has created real contradictions. These have been reported by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, both of which have published reports expressing concern about the future trajectories of the transitional regime.

Gabon has established a comprehensive legal framework to fight corruption; however, enforcement remains moderate, and official impunity is a problem. The Gabonese Penal Code criminalizes abuse of office, embezzlement, passive and active bribery, trading in influence, extortion, and offering or accepting gifts and other undue advantages. Yet grand corruption is pervasive and involves high-ranking government officials and elected officials who exploit opportunities presented through their government work.

One positive development was Gabon's rejoining of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2021, which, by reporting on a wide range of critical issues involving public management of the petroleum and mining sectors, represents a step toward controlling corruption. Petty corruption involves low-ranking civil servants and small sums of money. Among low-level government officials, there is an expectation of gift-giving and facilitation payments. This is part of the business culture in Gabon. Such corrupt payments are addressed by Gabonese law but can include under-the-table payments ("pots de vin"), fraud through falsifying data or bills, coercion or force to extort, and the receiving or demanding of undue money in the exercise of public functions. President Bongo had launched several highly publicized anti-corruption campaigns in recent years. It remains to be seen how anti-corruption policy will develop following the coup and downfall of the Bongo dynasty, especially once elections are held.

16 | Consensus-Building

Since 2023, the main actors have been General Brice Oligui Nguema, now serving as transitional president; members of the Republican Guard; and civilians General Oligui Nguema has appointed to the cabinet and parliament. In his speeches, General Oligui Nguema has committed to a democratic transition, with an initial deadline of two years. Having initially announced that the presidential election would take place in April 2025, it was in fact held four months earlier in January 2025, suggesting a commitment to civilian rule and democracy. Furthermore, having drafted a new constitution in consultation with members of civil society, allowed parties to continue to function except for the former ruling party and presented the new constitution to a referendum that was overwhelmingly approved by voters, Oligui Nguema has demonstrated both in words and actions a willingness to restore transitional democracy.

While there are political differences between the rich and poor, urban and rural interests, and the industrial and service sectors, all major political actors accept the market economy as an enduring feature of their economic system. There has been no

Anti-corruption
policy

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Consensus on goals

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change in this ideological consensus since the August 2023 coup. The transitional government has honored Gabon's public debts with private creditors, encouraged new private investment (not only in the extractive sector) and avoided the nationalization of businesses that have already been privatized. Moreover, no major political actors are calling for a socialist or communist system.

The main barriers to democratic reform have historically been influential members of the Bongo dynasty, powerful Téké securocrats in law enforcement and the armed forces, as well as members of the ruling PDG, whose privileges and power depended on maintaining de facto one-party regime. These anti-democratic actors used various means – including acts of violence, corrupt practices and exploiting the judiciary – to benefit the regime. Unfortunately, the courts consistently ruled in favor of the regime, severely disrupting the reform process.

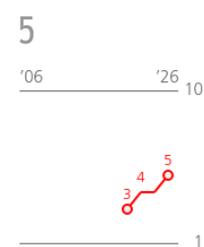
Following President Ali Bongo's stroke in 2018, divisions within the ruling dynasty intensified. Amid the ensuing palace intrigue, First Lady Sylvia Bongo and her eldest son, Nouredin Bongo, exploited the president's incapacitation to sideline other members of the regime and seize as much of the country's natural resource wealth for themselves and their collaborators as they could. This ended any pretense of democracy and, on the contrary, laid the groundwork for another quasi-dynastic succession.

These events provoked the August 2023 coup and brought a military junta to power, which – after disbanding the ruling party – civilianized its appearance and moved toward a return to democratic elections, now scheduled for 2025. Beyond the period under review, the leader of the coup won the presidential elections. The election of General Oligui Nguema as president follows noticeable improvement in the control of anti-democratic actors in the country. However, it remains to be seen how anti-democratic actors will be restrained and whether Oligui Nguema will remain committed to genuine democratic reform.

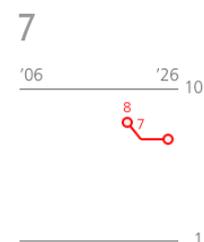
Gabon has at least 40 ethnic groups, with distinct languages and cultures. The largest is the Fang. Other prominent groups include the Myene, Bandjabi, Eshira and Bapounou. Gabon does not have a majority ethnic group around which the ruling PDG could organize an ethno-nationalist power structure. As a result, ethnic cleavages exist. The current transitional president, General Brice Oligui Nguema, has a mixed ethnic background, with a Téké mother and a Fang father.

Since the Téké are a very small ethnic group in the country, the previous Bongo administration's strategy was to use the ruling PDG as a vehicle for multiethnic caucusing. The strategy offered the largest ethnic group, the Fang (40% of the population), the prime ministership, as well as local governments in the capital, Libreville, and in northern Woleu-Ntem, while guaranteeing smaller ethnic groups protection from a Fang ethno-nationalist regime, similar to what exists in neighboring Equatorial Guinea. Because most ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in different

Anti-democratic actors



Cleavage / conflict management



regions, this strategy – referred to as “géopolitique” in the local political patois – co-opted influential ethnic leaders and educated ethnic elites from each region into local branches of the ruling PDG.

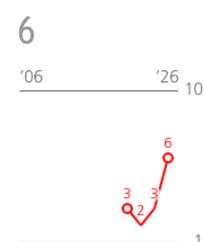
With the disbanding of the PDG and the 2025 elections still to be concluded, it is difficult to predict how ethnic minorities will fare under the new constitution.

In Libreville, the capital, where more than half the population lives, almost all the country’s ethnic groups are represented. Some numerically small but historically important groups, such as the Mpongwe, once held important positions of power. Whether the old ethnic political accords of “géopolitique” will continue or, on the contrary, a Fang-dominated regime will emerge from the forthcoming electoral contests remains to be seen. For now, General Oligui Nguema has not demonstrated a desire to establish Fang dominance of the political system.

After the August 2023 coup, the military junta suspended the constitutional order and announced that a new constitution would be drafted. Between April 2 and 30, 2024, General Brice Oligui Nguema, acting as a transitional president, launched a month-long inclusive national dialogue to gather recommendations for a new constitution and to prepare for elections in 2025. The work of the 580 participants – including members of civil society, religious organizations and politicians from the opposition – ended with the submission of a report containing nearly 1,000 proposals. According to the most recent September 2024 Afrobarometer survey, the overwhelming majority (81%) of Gabonese believe that the national dialogue should prioritize the development of the country rather than focus on political issues. This position was widely shared across major demographic groups. After incorporating numerous propositions into the draft constitution, General Oligui Nguema held a referendum on November 16, 2024, in which almost 92% voted in favor. These two major consultations – one with civil society, and the other a popular referendum that is widely considered to have been free and fair – combined with the transparent way in which both were undertaken mark a real advancement in civil society’s role in agenda-setting and policy formulation in Gabon. Rarely have members of civil society had such a direct impact on constitutional or electoral laws.

Gabon has not experienced a civil war or prolonged social conflict similar to those seen elsewhere on the African subcontinent. As a result, the country lacks a legacy of historical injustices against ethnic minorities or regional secessionist movements. “Stability” is a frequently used term by analysts to describe the country. Although the military coup of August 2023 overthrew President Ali Bongo, his close family members and his ruling party, it did not involve bloodshed and was widely celebrated in the streets. No ethnic groups have challenged the coup nor have popular protests emerged to defy the transitional regime. Gabon has remained peaceful since August 2023.

Public consultation



Reconciliation



17 | International Cooperation

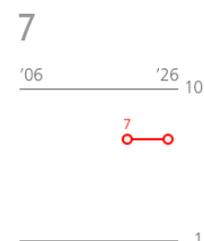
Gabon has consistently managed its international relations effectively. This includes both political relations through a series of cooperation agreements with France that ensure diplomatic, military, monetary, educational and reciprocal exchanges with its former colonial power, and economic relations through a widely developed network of international business relations with Europe (not only France), America (particularly the United States) and East Asia (especially China). After General Brice Oligui Nguema came to power in August 2023, he immediately traveled to meet with overseas partners to reassure them that, unlike other military juntas in Africa, Gabon's alliances with its traditional partners would remain intact and business would continue as usual. General Oligui Nguema did not break relations with France as junta leaders in the Sahel did, nor did he default on public debts that were accumulated and misappropriated by the Bongo dynasty.

Given that Oligui Nguema was able to receive explicit support from numerous governments in the West and the Far East – including generous extensions on the payment of arrears by private creditors; new military cooperation agreements with the United States, particularly the West Virginia National Guard; and invitations to both the Élysée Palace and the White House – it is evident that the political leadership has strategically leveraged international assistance to advance its development strategy. For the time being, this agenda continues to prioritize extractive industries, the protection of the Congo Basin rainforest and the promotion of direct foreign investment in Gabon's free trade zones.

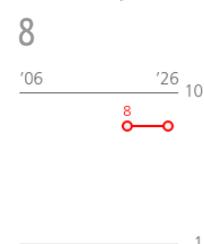
For the most part, Gabon acts as a credible and reliable partner and shows notable engagement in international cooperation efforts. For example, Gabon has actively participated in international forums to address the effects of global warming and manage its nonrenewable resources. As a leader in the Paris climate accords, the U.S.-backed Congo Basin Rainforest initiative and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), Gabon has demonstrated its commitment to these causes. Since the August 2023 coup, General Brice Oligui Nguema has recommitted his regime to rainforest protection to help absorb carbon (Gabon is more than carbon neutral; it is a net carbon sink, removing carbon from the atmosphere). Thanks to Gabon's rainforests and some of the world's tallest mangrove forests, combined with strong government policy, the country has removed roughly one billion tons of net carbon dioxide from the atmosphere over the past decade.

In October 2021, Gabon was re-admitted as an EITI implementing country. Moreover, in October 2022, the country announced the verification of over 90 million tons of forest-based emission reductions, which are being traded in carbon markets, with the resulting credits allocated to Gabon's sovereign wealth fund. Moreover, Gabon has successfully completed the verification of \$90 million in carbon credits

Effective use of support



Credibility



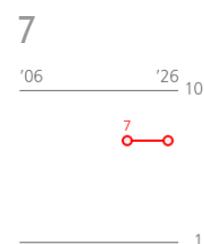
under the United Nations' Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) program, which aims to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

Despite fulfilling its environmental commitments, the transitional government is struggling to manage its burdensome debt, inherited from the Bongo era. In January 2025, the World Bank decided to suspend its disbursements to Gabon, citing payment arrears amounting to XAF 17 billion (\$26.7 million).

Relations between General Oligui Nguema and his neighbors appear cordial. For example, he was received by Republic of the Congo President Denis Sassou Nguesso on October 2, 2023 – whose grandson, Omar Denis Bongo Jr., remains a contender for power in Libreville – and by Cameroon President Paul Biya on December 7, 2023, for a state visit with the doyen of Françafrique. He also attended the inauguration of Chadian President Mahamat Déby Itno on May 22, 2024, and met with Central African Republic President Faustin-Archange Touadéra on August 13, 2024, to secure his endorsement of Gabon's democratic transitional process. These engagements suggest that the general-turned-president has secured his place within the exclusive club of Central Africa's heads of state.

At stake was Gabon's suspension from the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema condemned the August 30, 2023, putsch that brought Oligui Nguema to power. On September 19, 2023, Oligui Nguema made his first official visit and met with Obiang Nguema to discuss important matters between the two neighboring countries, including Gabon's automatic suspension from CEMAC, which is led by Malabo. Gabon was quickly restored to full membership rights and Oligui Nguema also received a letter that incriminated opposition leader Albert Ondo Ossa, who had allegedly sought assistance from Equatorial Guinea to overthrow Oligui Nguema's junta. Close relations between these two Fang soldiers demonstrate progress in Gabon's ability to manage relations with its immediate northern neighbor in spite of the two countries' long-standing dispute over the Mbanie and Cocotier islands.

Regional
cooperation



Strategic Outlook

There are four principal recommendations to advance Gabon's development. While the prospects for establishing a more democratic political system appear possible, given the chance for fair and free elections in 2025, Gabon should strategically use its revenues from natural resources to diversify its economy and re-evaluate its international relations with great powers.

Managing the political transition will be crucial for any hope of democratizing the country. This will include organizing free and fair elections, and managing potential threats from spoilers, such as elites from the former regime and the military.

Redirecting windfall profits from natural resources toward alleviating Gabon's extensive public debt, while investing strategically in a green economy and diversified growth, could set the country on a more sustainable and positive course. In turn, such measures could facilitate Gabon's transition into an emerging economy capable of reaping the benefits of these strategic choices.

Dependency on extractive industries remains the central obstacle to economic and political transition. Reliance on extractive sectors is linked to poverty and authoritarianism. Therefore, diversification away from these industries is imperative, reflecting the government's ongoing efforts to reduce dependence on the oil and gas sector. Although the previous Bongo regime repeatedly promised to diversify the economy beyond natural resource extraction, none of its development plans achieved this objective. Consequently, the critical question remains: diversify into what? Given the country's unique natural wealth and the need for biodiversity in the coming century, a long-term strategy of conserving the Congo rainforest may represent the only savings account that truly matters for the people. Ultimately, the elite must decide what they value more: their country or their offshore fiscal paradises.

In addition, the country's international relations remain critical to both economic growth and democratization. Gabon functioned for a long time as a neocolonial enclave of enduring French interests, maintaining close ties with its former colonial metropole. Although it has attempted to diversify its dependencies toward emerging economies in East Asia, especially Singapore and China, France still controls Gabon's monetary policy through the Central African CFA franc. Furthermore, France maintains several hundred special forces personnel stationed at Camp Charles de Gaulle, near Libreville's international airport. French cooperation agents play a significant role in providing technical assistance. French is the official language and the primary medium of education in the country, fostering an educated elite with a Francophone worldview. French businesses have traditionally maintained a dominant presence in Gabon, supported by an active commercial service in Paris, and thousands of French expatriates who live and work in the country. The largest foreign corporations operating in Gabon tend to be French. Diplomatic relations with France are managed through the ministries of foreign affairs and defense, as well as the Élysée. Gabon regularly participates in Franco-African summits of heads of state and the large cultural International Organization of Francophonie, and provides strategic support for France's policy in Africa, including military interventions.

However, a new generation of Gabonese elites has sought to break free from the shadow of “Françafrique.” Gabon’s entry into the British Commonwealth in 2022 marked a major step in reducing its reliance on France and signaled a shift toward more diversified international partnerships with the endorsement of Western partners. While enhanced trade relations with the United Kingdom hold considerable promise for Gabon, it has become clear that the Bongo dynasty’s pivot toward the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth was partly motivated by the offshoring of natural resource rents through financial trading firms controlled by Ali Bongo’s eldest son, Nouredin Bongo. Multilateral forums, such as the British Commonwealth, provide Gabon with opportunities to lobby other major power donors and diplomatic players, including India and Canada, and could introduce an era in which ordinary Gabonese communicate in English. However, following the August 2023 coup, Gabon’s membership in the British Commonwealth was suspended. Moreover, General Oligui Nguema ensured that the country’s 2024 constitution retained French as the country’s sole official language, and there are few indications that he intends to maintain Nouredin Bongo’s controversial investment firms in the City of London.