

## **Gabon August 27 Presidential Election: repression hardens before a probable electoral coup d'Etat**

*Collective for Solidarity with Social and Political Struggle in Africa, Paris, 27 July 2016*

The Bongo family and the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) have run Gabon since 1967.<sup>1</sup> By rigging one election after another, they have prevented the country from becoming democratic. In spite of the clearly visible unpopularity of the outgoing Head of State and his small reservoir of electors, as in other African dictatorships it is unlikely that a change of government will be brought about through an electoral process.

The lack of dialogue and agreement between Government and opposition about the electoral process itself is reason enough to predict that fraud will take place and that the real results of the election will be turned upside down. In the first-past-the-post presidential election to be held on 27 August, if nothing is done to restore the ground rules of democracy as they pertain to an electoral process, the most likely scenario will be another Ali Bongo victory, after he has been challenged by the two or three main opposition candidates. His score will be constructed via three stages of fraud. Firstly with the small number of people who have actually voted for him, plus the votes of foreigners and other contentious additions to the electoral register<sup>2</sup>; secondly, on the day of the vote itself, from ballot-box stuffing and falsification of result forms; and, finally, from supplementary percentages added during the compilation of the result forms by the election commission (CENAP), with the complicity of a Constitutional Court acquiescent to the outgoing Head of State.

According to representatives of Gabonese civil society, the current electoral roll, which has not been updated since 2013, lends itself to this scenario. Before the 2013 local elections, the implementation of an electoral biometrics system by Gemalto was contested both in terms of its cost and its effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> On 10 March 2016, a complaint was jointly lodged in Paris against Gemalto by the Representative Council of Black Associations in France (CRAN) and the activists Marc Ona and Jean-Jacques Eyi Ngwaa.<sup>4</sup> for "passive and active bribery of foreign or international public officials".<sup>5</sup> Members of the opposition and civil society are demanding an audit of the electoral register. In early June, following its pre-electoral mission, the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) adopted the requirement, recommending that "Concrete steps should be taken to enhance confidence amongst candidates and political parties in the voters list, and could include a professional, public audit of the registry", and proposing, unsuccessfully, that there should be high level dialogue between politicians, that citizen observers be allowed to monitor all phases of the electoral process across the country, and that the compilation of results be transparent<sup>6</sup>. However, the NDI made these recommendations late in the process and, until now, they have not been of no avail.

The CENAP being moved, in early July, to the City of Democracy controlled by the Republican Guard has underlined its lack of independence. The question of the organization of the decentralized local branches of the CENAP is a problem.<sup>7</sup> The Constitutional Court has not changed since 2009 and is still chaired by Mary Magdalene Mborantsuo.<sup>8</sup> Many other difficulties in the electoral process have been highlighted by civil society representatives, among others "The identification, registration, and mapping of all voting centres and polling stations so that the use of pirated ballot boxes by electoral criminals can be avoided: the provision of all of this information to the public; the democratic safeguarding of the vote; the presence of national and international observers in the polling stations and in the various compilation centres".<sup>9</sup> On the whole, in spite of the fact that the scenario to be expected for fraud is common knowledge, measures to prevent such fraud, or even a large part of it, have not been taken.

The three main opposition candidates are Jean Ping, Guy Nzouma Ndama and Casimir Oye Mba.<sup>10</sup> On 15 July, the CENAP validated 14 candidates. Six of them are from micro-parties close to the government, and are

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<sup>1</sup> With Togo, Gabon is at the head of the list of accumulated number of years in power without democratic change of president or parliament in Africa 5.3.1 <https://regardexcentrique.wordpress.com/2016/03/30/apres-26-ans-de-democratisation-dictature-et-democratie-bientot-a-lequilibre-en-afrique/>

<sup>2</sup> Complaint lodged against Gemalto and quality of electoral register, Marc Ona, 3.3.15, Paris, <http://regismarzin.blogspot.fr/2015/06/2-mars-2015-paris-conference-de-presse.html>

<sup>3</sup> File on Biometrics (in French) by R. Marzin: <https://regardexcentrique.wordpress.com/2015/06/10/la-biometrie-electorale-en-afrique-dossier/>

<sup>4</sup> President Gabonese Observatory for the Social Responsibility of Corporations, Government Services and Industries (OGARSEAI)

<sup>5</sup> Order by Judge Roger le Loire giving "partie civile" status at the Tribunal de Grande Instance Paris on 30.06.16

<sup>6</sup> 3 June, 2016, <https://www.ndi.org/declaration-preliminaire-gabon-french>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20160722-gabon-militants-presente-chaque-etape-processus-electoral>

<sup>8</sup> <https://regardexcentrique.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/gabon-du-coup-detat-electoral-de-2009-au-depart-anticipe-dali-bongo/>

<sup>9</sup> ROLBG, meeting between NDI and Gabonese civil society, 30.05.16, <http://www.afriquesenlutte.org/afrique-centrale/gabon/article/rencontre-ndi-the-national>

<sup>10</sup> Jean Ping, Guy Nzouma Ndama of Heritage and Modernity, President of the National Assembly until 31.03.16, and Casimir Oye Mba of Union Nationale (the National Union party).

suspected of having for sole function the future justification of lower than expected scores for the three main opposition candidates. Until now, the debate about the electoral process has focused on Ali Bongo's disputed birth certificates.<sup>11</sup> This matter has been central to the Opposition's communications for the past two years; they have wanted to show that Ali Bongo Ondimba has no official document proving that he is Gabonese by birth, an essential condition to be eligible for the presidency (Article 10 of the constitution).<sup>12</sup>

In late March 2016, Gabon accepted the principle of a European observation mission.<sup>13</sup> The European Union (EU) at first envisaged financing a Gabonese civil society observation project,<sup>14</sup> before focusing on its own observation mission. It will send 60 people, of whom 22 will be long-term observers, and a mission of Members of the European Parliament. On 25 July, Federica Mogherini said that "the establishment of a real dialogue between the political actors would contribute to the calming of the political climate and the avoidance of tension and radicalization".<sup>15</sup> The head of the mission, MEP Mariya Gabriel has said, "The central African region needs now more than ever examples of democratic and undisputed elections." Unfortunately, in similar situations, in dictatorships, the EU has experienced several failures of its observation missions, due to their neutralization. An African Union mission of observation, probably just as much of a sham as the recent ones in Chad and Djibouti<sup>16</sup>, has been announced<sup>17</sup>.

On 22 July, during a 48-hour visit with the Special Representative for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily, the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman "stressed the importance of holding credible elections, with the participation of regional and international observers and the free participation of the media".<sup>18</sup> However, the international community is currently focused on the need for democratic change in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Gabon's democratization process has received very little support, although frauds are being prepared upstream.<sup>19</sup>

The future electoral coup is taking shape through a rapid increase in repression. Opposition demonstrations are prohibited. Arbitrary arrests are increasing. In total, around thirty members of the opposition and civil society were arrested between 9-23 July.

For example, during a demonstration on 9 July, three union leaders, Jean Remy Yama, president of the union grouping "Dynamique Unitaire - Dynamic Together", Roger Ondo Abessolo, confederal secretary of Dynamique Unitaire and Cyrilin Koumba Mba Essiane were arrested,<sup>20</sup> and then on 21 July three young members of "Union Nationale - National Union", one of whom is the coordinator of the Youth Movement of the party. On 23 July, a peaceful demonstration was violently dispersed despite the presence in the front line of politicians, among them the candidates Casimir Oye Mba and Guy Nzouba-Ndama.<sup>21</sup> An AFP journalist Jean *Dabany*, was "beaten up by the security forces".<sup>22</sup> The army has been deployed in the Gabonese capital to impress and intimidate. The repression is mostly done by the judicial police and the army, with the participation of foreign mercenaries.

In the likely event of a new electoral coup in Gabon, the country would enter into post-election conflict exacerbated by the fact that this coup d'état would follow the one of 2009 and the systematic electoral heists that marked the 42 year rule of Omar Bongo Ondimba.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.marianne.net/election-presidentielle-au-gabon-ali-bongo-faussaire-100244170.html>

<sup>12</sup> Under Article 10 "any person who has become Gabonese by acquisition of nationality may not be a candidate for the presidency of the Republic. Only offspring having remained without interruption in Gabon are allowed to be candidates, as of the fourth generation."

<sup>13</sup> <http://jeanping.org/le-gabon-accepte-lobserverie-des-elections-en-2016-par-lunion-europeenne/>, <http://gabonreview.com/blog/presidentielle-2016-mission-exploratoire-de-lue-a-libreville/>

<sup>14</sup> Led by, among others, the Network of Free Civil Society Organizations for Good Governance in Gabon (ROLBG).

<sup>15</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2016/160725\\_04\\_fr.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2016/160725_04_fr.htm)

<sup>16</sup> Regis Marzin, 5.7.16, <https://regardexcentrique.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/les-elections-sans-democratie-de-mars-et-avril-2016-en-afrique/>

<sup>17</sup> OIF and NDI observers will be present too, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160729-gabon-observateurs-internationaux-elections-scrutin>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.un.org/sg/offthecuff/index.asp?nid=4638>, <http://gabonreview.com/blog/presidentielle-2016-conseils-de-jeffrey-feltman/>

<sup>19</sup> To be noted, from 12.7.16, resolution 821 of the <sup>114</sup>th US Congress <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/821/text>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160722-gabon-nouvelles-arrestations-opposants-bongo>, Jean Rémy Yama, president of the SNEC, president of the Trades Union Confederation "Dynamique Unitaire - Dynamic Together" and general coordinator of the Citizen movement "Les témoins actifs - Active Witnesses", Roger Ondo Abessolo, president of the SYNATRASS (National Union of Social Affairs Workers), Confederal Secretary of union grouping "Dynamique Unitaire" and member of the movement "Témoins actifs", Koumba Mba Essiane, president of the SYNPA (National Union of Agricultural Personnel), member of the "Témoins actifs" movement, <http://www.gabonactu.com/2016/07/26-manifestants-arretes-samedi-parquet-lundi/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160723-gabon-police-disperse-brutalement-manifestation-opposition-libreville>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/344204/politique/gabon-heurts-lors-dune-marche-de-lopposition/>, <http://www.gabonactu.com/2016/07/11390/>

The Collective for Solidarity with Social and Political Struggle in Africa asks the French government and the European External Action Service of the EU to:

- put pressure on the Gabonese government to comply with constitutional freedoms, particularly the freedom to demonstrate and freedom of expression, and put an end to arbitrary arrests and detentions to which members of the opposition, civil society and the unions are being subjected,
- support the demands of the opposition and civil society with regard to the electoral process; among other things real inclusive dialogue with the opposition parties before the vote, an audit of the electoral register, a restructuring of the CENAP, fair access for the opposition to public media, the opportunity to observe throughout the country transparent procedures for the collection and transmission of results, and publication of detailed, verifiable results,
- in order to prevent electoral conflict, propose a combined political and technical international accompaniment for the electoral processes, in addition to the technical EU observation mission which runs the danger of being manipulated,
- report all instances of fraud, all failures to ensure the transparency necessary to guarantee the value of the results, and all likely turnarounds of results that could happen,
- take into account the quality of the electoral process when reassessing French and European cooperation with Gabon, with regard to the quality and level of its democratic practices in helping Gabon to become democratic.

Collective for Solidarity with Social and Political Struggle in Africa, 27 July 2016,

12 Signatories: Enough is enough (Ca suffit comme ça - Gabon), Network of Free Organizations of Gabonese Civil Society (ROLBG), Union for National Salvation (USN, Djibouti), Paris Region branch of the Togolese National Alliance for Change (ANC-IDF, Togo), Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC), Collective of Democratic and Patriotic Organizations of the Cameroonian Diaspora (CODE, Brussels and Paris), Federation of Congolese from the Diaspora (FCD, Congo Brazzaville), Chadian Vital Forces in Exile (Forces vives tchadiennes en exil), Amicale PanAfricaine, African Struggles (Afriques en Lutte), Left Party (Parti de Gauche), Europe Ecology-The Greens (Europe Ecologie les Verts, EELV).

With regard to the 8 non-democratic countries in Africa which will hold presidential elections in 2016, the **Collective for Solidarity with Social and Political Struggle in Africa demands that the conditions essential for an electoral process** be met:

- no repression of the opposition,
- the prerequisite of minimum rule of law conditions: freedom of the press, freedom to demonstrate, freedom of organization for civil society and the political parties,
- inclusive dialogue with the opposition,
- consensus on the composition of a neutral Independent Electoral Commission,
- consensus on the method for producing the electoral register,
- the possibility to present legal challenges in front of an indisputably independent court.

The demands that were made in the letter to the EU dated 8 March 2016 can be found at the following link (in French): <https://electionsafrique.wordpress.com/2016/03/08/congo-b-djibouti-tchad-lettre-a-ue-politique-europeenne-et-processus-electoraux-sans-democratie-en-afrique-en-2016/>

### Probable non-credible presidential electoral processes in Africa in 2016

Date of Vote	Country	President	Time in Power
18 February	Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	30 years
20 March + 10 April	Congo Brazzaville	Denis Sassou Nguesso	32 years
8 and 22 April	Djibouti	Ismaël Omar Guelleh	17 + Uncle 22 = 39
24 April	Equatorial Guinea	Teodoro Obiang	37 years
10 April + 9 May	Chad	Idriss Déby	26 years
27 August	Gabon	Ali Bongo	7 years + Father 42 = 49
27 November or 2017	Congo Kinshasa	Joseph Kabila	10 (2x5ys max)
1 December	Gambia	Yahya Jammeh	22 years

The **Collective for Solidarity with Social and Political Struggle in Africa** has devoted itself to a number of events and crises, focusing on electoral processes, in particular:

May 2016, Congo Brazzaville, Djibouti, Chad : The vicious circle of electoral processes without democracy  
April 2016, Equatorial Guinea : Open letter to European union and french, spanish and american governments  
April 2016, Djibouti, France, Ue: Analysis of the electoral process before the presidential election of 8 April  
April 2016: Chad, France: Analysis of the electoral process before the presidential election of 10 April  
March 2016, Congo Brazzaville: Analysis of the electoral process before the presidential election of 20 March  
March 2016, Congo Brazzaville, Djibouti, Chad: Open letter to EU on 3 presidential without democracy  
January 2016 : Djibouti, 21 December 2015 massacre and the brutal stopping of the electoral process  
December 2015 : Congo Brazzaville : An Analysis of the Constitutional Coup d'Etat – An Open Letter to the UN, EU and the President of France  
October 2015 : Congo Brazzaville : A Constitutional Coup d'Etat – An Open Letter to the European Union  
July 2015, Togo and European Policy: Letter to the European Union about Togo and the democratization of Africa (reply in French)  
May 2015, Togo : Letter to the UN, UE, OIF: presidential elections and support for democratization in Africa  
April 2015, Togo: Presidential election, are democracy and political change possible?  
February 2015, Nine proposals to the European Union to support democratization in Africa  
February 2015, EU and African elections in 2015 and 2016: revive Europe relationship - Africa through increased support to democratization'  
November 2014, Chad, widespread repression against demonstrators cut international communications  
October 2014 Burkina Faso, Africa: limiting the number of presidential terms, no exception is no longer acceptable  
October 2014, Chad, support for civil society in Chad following the day 'dead city'  
March 2014, CAR and Chad, influence and involvement in CAR I Déby of mid-2012 to January 2014  
January 2014, Djibouti, press repression, electoral disputes and European politics  
December 2013, Chad, Information Package on possible rehabilitation of Idriss Déby  
November 2013, Togo, press following the visit of Faure Gnassingbé at the Elysee  
October 2013, Chad, release on French policy in Chad  
September 2013, Cameroon, communicated on legislative  
July 2013, policy of France in Africa, statement on military influence  
May 2013, Equatorial Guinea, parliamentary elections and elections Oil Press  
April 2013, Togo, business fires, letter to Laurent Fabius  
February 2013, Djibouti, Togo, Cameroon, Guinea, elections: open letter to National Assembly  
February 2013, Djibouti, elections: press  
January 2013, Togo, elections, collective open letter to the European Union  
July 2012, Congo Brazzaville, elections, collective statement  
December 2011, Gabon, general elections: information package  
October 2011, Cameroon, presidential election: information package, mobilization and rally  
2010: fifty years of independence: participation in organizing the demonstration on July 14, 2010  
March 2010, Togo, presidential election: mobilization, advocacy and communicated to EU