



Gabon Military Takes Power in Eighth Coup in West and Central Africa Since 2020

On August 30, officers of the Gabonese Armed Forces declared that they had seized power in a military coup, placing Gabonese President Ali Bongo under house arrest, along with his family and doctors.



AP Images

Defaced billboard of ousted Gabonese president Ali Bongo in Libreville

The soldiers delivered a live speech in the early morning, pledging that they would “defend peace by putting an end to the current regime” while claiming to speak for “Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions,” as per reports from AFP news.

After the speech, journalists with AFP reported the sound of gunfire in Gabon’s capital, Libreville, though it was unclear to them at that point of time whether skirmishes were taking place.

Moreover, Nouredin Bongo Valentin, one of the president’s sons, and other prominent government officials, together with some members of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party, have also been arrested, the coup leaders revealed in a statement reported by AFP.

The president’s allies have been slammed for “high treason against the institutions of the state, massive misappropriation of public funds, organized international financial embezzlement, forgery, falsification of the signature of the President of the Republic, active corruption, and drug trafficking,” the statement read.

The coup came after election results in the country last weekend were disputed. While Bongo won in his third reelection, the military argued against the credibility of the results, stating that they were not valid. Later, the coup leaders proclaimed that the election results had been nullified and that all state institutions had been dissolved, basically ending almost 60 years of rule by the Bongo family.

In just one voting round, Bongo had supposedly obtained almost 65 percent of the vote, surpassing main rival Albert Ondo Ossa, who received around 30 percent. After the ballot results, Ossa and his opposition alliance sought to oust Bongo, stating that various polling stations opened several hours late.

Notably, the opposition has also contested the validity of both of Bongo’s past electoral victories.

As polling was about to conclude last Saturday, the incumbent government, to pre-empt an outcry and the spread of “false news,” shut down the internet nationwide as it enforced a curfew. The government also banned French media outlets such as France 24, RFI, and TV5 Monde, owing to their alleged bias. On the morning of August 30, CET time, the internet was restored after being shut down for three days, based on AFP reports.

Bongo has been in power since 2009, and previously faced a military coup attempt in 2019. During the 2019 coup attempt, armed military officers took hostages and declared the creation of a “National Restoration Council” to “restore democracy in Gabon.” Nonetheless, the mutiny was rapidly suppressed, and led to a few casualties.

The military explained the latest coup as an attempt to “defend peace by putting an end” to Bongo’s “irresponsible, unpredictable governance.” The soldiers behind the coup denounced Bongo’s 14 years in office for leading to a “deterioration in social cohesion that risks leading the country into chaos.”



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 1, 2023

Meanwhile, in a video circulating on social media, Bongo urged “friends around the world to make some noise” after his house arrest.

The ousted leader confirmed that he was at his residence but maintained that “nothing is happening. I don’t know what is going on.”

Brice Oligui Nguema, the leader of Libreville’s presidential guard, who launched the coup, told French news outlet *Le Monde* that the president would “enjoy all his rights” while kept under house arrest.

“He is a Gabonese head of state. He is retired. He enjoys all his rights. He is a normal Gabonese, like everyone else,” Nguema was cited as saying. Military officers also nominated Nguema as Gabon’s new ruler after a meeting of commanders-in-chief of the Security and Safety Forces, based on local media reports.

Prior to Nguema’s appointment, elated soldiers carried him through the streets of Libreville. Nguema hitherto served Gabon’s long-time former president, Omar Bongo, before working with his son, the now deposed leader Ali Bongo.

Gabon, with a population of 2.3 million, shares borders with Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, and Equatorial Guinea. Prior to its independence in 1960, the country was a French colony.

The Gabonese military coup has been the latest in a host of military takeovers in Africa in recent years, coming just weeks after soldiers staged a coup in Niger, another former French colony.

At the moment, the situation in Niger remains volatile, with the regional ECOWAS bloc contemplating a Paris-backed military intervention to reinstate Niger’s ousted president, Mohamed Bazoum. The new military rulers in Niger, another former French colony, have refused to release Bazoum, despite pressure from ECOWAS.

Mali and Burkina Faso, where the militaries also staged coups in recent years, have pledged to shield Niger’s new government from external forces. French forces had to retreat from Mali and Burkina Faso after coups in those two countries, due to an outburst of anti-French sentiment there.

Significantly, the latest Gabonese coup signifies a huge threat to France’s interests in Africa as about 350 troops are stationed in the oil-rich former French colony. In a statement, French Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne [said](#) that her country was monitoring the situation in Gabon carefully.

In response to the Gabonese coup, EU foreign-policy chief Josep Borrell announced that the bloc’s defense ministers will discuss the situation in the Central African country.

“If this is confirmed, it is another military coup which increases instability in the whole region,” Borrell proclaimed, during a meeting of EU defense ministers in the Spanish city of Toledo, Reuters reported.

While voicing worries about Gabon, Borrell added that coups in other parts of Africa were “a big issue for Europe.”

“The whole area, starting with Central African Republic, then Mali, then Burkina Faso, now Niger, maybe Gabon, it’s in a very difficult situation and certainly the [EU] ministers ... have to have a deep thought on what is going on there and how we can improve our policy in respect with these countries,” he said.

In a statement published August 31, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Central Africa’s political alliance, castigated the coup.



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The bloc denounced the “use of force as a means of resolving political conflicts and access to power.” It publicized an “imminent” meeting of regional heads of state, together with peace and security leaders, to decide on “the way forward.”



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