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Coup in Gabon

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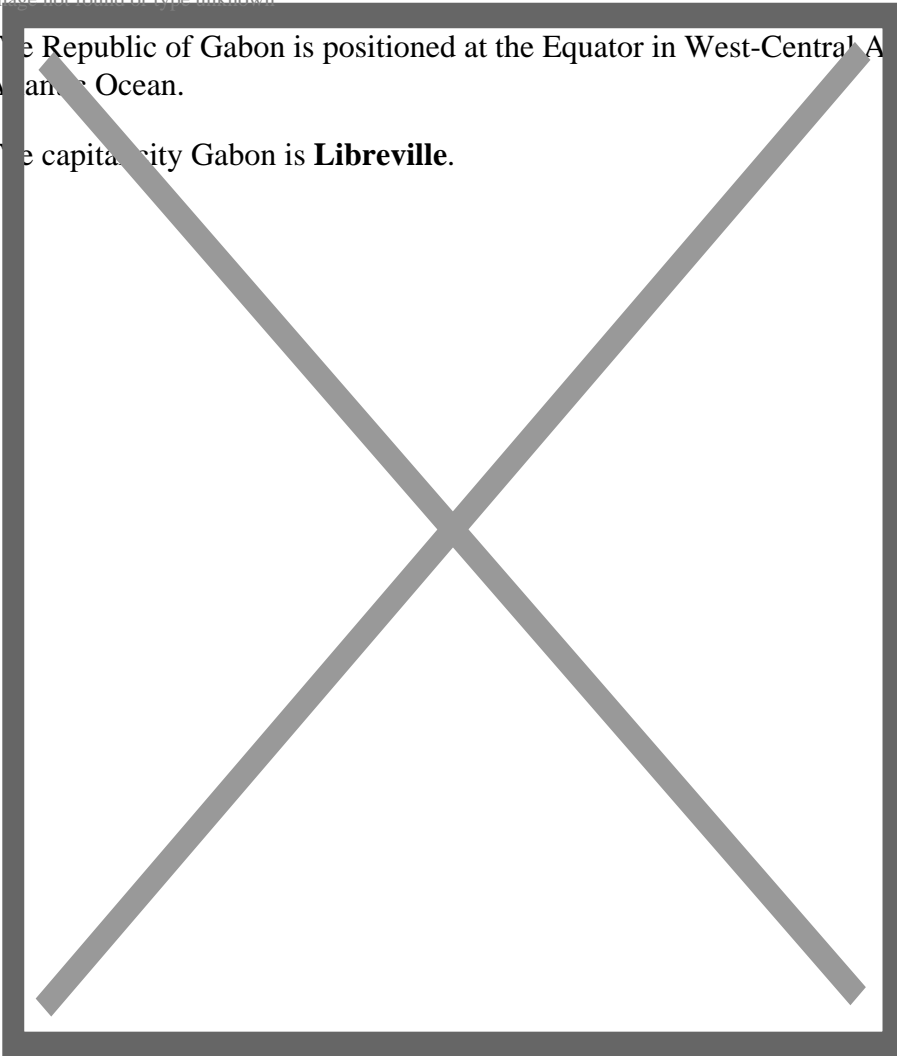
Why is in news? Military officers said they had seized power in the oil-rich Central African nation of Gabon early Wednesday, overturning the results of a disputed election that returned the incumbent, President Ali Bongo Ondimba, to a third term in office.

About Gabon:

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The Republic of Gabon is positioned at the Equator in West-Central Africa, with its borders extending to the Atlantic Ocean.

The capital city of Gabon is **Libreville**.



Its neighboring countries encompass

Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon to the north, and the Republic of the Congo to the east and south.

Gabon was a former French Colony and gained independence from France on August 17, 1960.

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthy Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

The languages spoken in Gabon are **French (official)** and a variety of Bantu languages.

Gabon employs the **Central African CFA franc (XAF)** as its currency,

In terms of religion, the majority of Gabon's populace identifies as **Christian**, while a minority adheres to Islam, and a smaller segment follows traditional beliefs.

The **Ogooué river** is the largest watercourse in Gabon.

It's an **oil-rich country** on the **west coast of Central Africa**, with a small population of just 2.4 million.

Gabon is a **member of the OPEC** oil cartel, with a production of 181,000 barrels of crude a day, making it the **eighth-largest producer of oil in sub-Saharan Africa**.

According to U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) data, Gabon is the **second-biggest manganese producer in the world** and mined an estimated 4.6 million metric tons of the metal in 2022.

Gabon **till date has not been afflicted by jihadi violence** and had been seen as **relatively stable**.

According to World Bank, nearly 40% of Gabonese aged 15-24 were out of work in 2020.

About Ali Bongo: He was declared the winner of disputed elections and has been president since 2009. Before that, his father was in power for 41 years.

Reasons behind the coup in Gabon:

Corruption: Many democratically elected leaders have faced accusations of corrupt practices and excessive alignment with Western interests.

According to Sherpa, a French NGO dedicated to accountability, nine members of the Bongo family, meanwhile, are under investigation in France, and some face preliminary charges of embezzlement, money laundering and other forms of corruption.

Misappropriation of funds: Former Gabonese President Ali Bongo imported fake snow to the Presidential Palace for a snowy Christmas in Libreville, exemplifying the misuse of state funds by those in power.

Single family rule: President Ali Bongo governed from 2009, succeeding his father President Omar Bongo who led from 1967 to 2009. This familial domination covered 56 out of 63 years of Gabon's independent existence, controlling the nation's rich resources.

Economic hardships: According to the World Bank, nearly 40 percent of Gabonese people aged 15-24 were out of work in 2020.

Former French colonies: All the seven countries in Africa where coups have occurred in the last two years were former French colonies leading to an opinion among experts that French colonialism is to blame for the range of instabilities in the region.

In the Sahel region, rising anti-French sentiment is fuelled by the dominance of French companies in mining resources.

Coup:

Coup is a French word that means a **blow or strike in French**.

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When **people illegally take action to overthrow the government** - and often use violence or threats to make it happen.

They normally do this because they are unhappy with how the government is run and want to take power themselves.

Military coup means taking over the existing leadership of government in any country by military usually the armed forces chief of the same country who's existing government is overthrown.

The new government is established and run by military.

Difference between coup and coup d'état:

Coup d'état means "a sudden attempt by a small group of people to take over the government usually through violence."

But coup means "an impressive victory or achievement that usually is difficult or unexpected": It was a major coup when the team traded for the star pitcher.

Reasons for non-survival of democracy in Africa:

Colonial cartography, argues Peter Murdock, **without considering the tribal and ethnic groupings** leading to civil strife and wars in African countries such as Burundi, Central African Republic etc.

The **surge of foreign interest in Africa**, dubbed as the 'New Scramble' for resources and influence in the continent;

A **democratic recession** in Sub-Saharan Africa with **weakening of democratic institutions** and civil society; and

The **emergence of new and subtle methods of overturning** constitutionally mandated presidential term limits and subsequently winning rigged or managed elections.

In the early postcolonial decades when coups were rampant, Africa's coup leaders virtually always offered the same reasons for toppling governments: **corruption, mismanagement, poverty:**

Corruption: The leader of Guinea's recent coup, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, echoed these justifications, citing "poverty and endemic corruption" as reasons for overthrowing 83 year old president Alpha Conde. According to Afrobarometer survey, 72% believe ordinary citizens "risk retaliation or other negative consequences" if they report corruption to authorities.

Poverty: One in three people are now unemployed in Nigeria, West Africa's largest economy. The same goes for South Africa, the most industrialized African nation. The economic impoverishment often steams anger and coups.

Mismanagement: The irony of promising to strengthen rule of law, by taking power forcefully and breaking those same rule of law is self-defeating in nature. But the African people tired of misgovernance find this argument convincing and often end up supporting despots in the hope of a better rule.

Low faith in democracy: African elections are becoming increasingly contentious and marked by fear. Worryingly, Afrobarometer's surveys have indicated that only a minority of Africans believe elections help produce representative, and accountable leadership.

External involvement: Russia has been notorious in this regard and its mercenary groups appear to play a deeper role in countries such as Mali, Libya, and the Central African Republic. Even the role of the United States (US) has been questioned as reports of the Malian coup plotters receiving training and assistance in the US emerged.

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Way forward:

To reverse this trend of growing coups in Africa, both African leaders and its external partners would have to play a crucial role.

African countries **need to quantitatively and qualitatively democratize** and truly decolonise.

African regional organisations must **engage effectively with the civil society and major powers**, on the other hand, must rethink and reassess its old tradition of shaping engagement with Africa.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):

The ECOWAS, also known as CEDEAO in French, is a regional intergovernmental organization established **in 1975**.

It was created through the **Lagos Treaty**, ECOWAS **aims to foster economic integration, cooperation, and development among West African nations**.

The Secretariat, headquartered in **Abuja, Nigeria**.

ECOWAS consists of **15 member states**: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo.

Gabon is not a member of ECOWAS.

Beyond the goals of economic cooperation, ECOWAS has **attempted to quell military conflicts in the region**.

ECOWAS also operated a regional peacekeeping operation known as ECOMOG, led by Nigeria in the 1990s and early 2000s.

It suspended members like **Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso** following coups in those countries, **refusing to recognize their new governments**.

Objectives:

Promoting economic integration among member states.

Facilitating the free movement of people, goods, and services.

Enhancing regional cooperation in various sectors, including industry, transport, energy, and finance.

Fostering a borderless region governed by democratic principles, the rule of law, and good governance.

Addressing security and political challenges through collaboration and conflict resolution.

Gabon: Last African country hit by military coup

All eyes turn to Gabon as tiny country becomes last African nation hit by military coup



POPULATION:
2.1 MILLION

- It gains **independence from France** in 1960
- Central African country hosts **military bases of France, US**



Ali Bongo



IT HAS BEEN RULED BY BONGO FAMILY SINCE 1967

1967

After death of first President Leon M'ba, Omar Bongo replaces him

Era of Ali Bongo, son of Omar Bongo

2009

Omar Bongo dies from heart attack in Spain

2016

Ali Bongo is reelected president

Elections and coup

AUG. 26, 2023

Ali Bongo wins vote for 3rd term as president

Curfew, internet blackout in final hours of voting sparks criticism

Opposition claims electoral fraud

AUG. 30, 2023

A group of military officers seize power

RICH IN NATURAL RESOURCES

- Gabon is rich in natural resources such as **oil, natural gas, diamond, uranium, gold, timber, and iron**
- **Foreign companies extract resources** in Central African country
- After coup, **French mining company Eramet announces halt of its operations** in Gabon