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Gabon

The end of a dynasty

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By putting an end to Bongo's power, the army is trying to perpetuate the system, but it is not counting on the popular will for real change in the country.

A few hours after the announcement of Ali Bongo's election victory, General Brice Oligui Nguema, head of the presidential guard, announced the army's seizure of power and denounced a rigged election. A week later, he became president of the transition.

Turning the page

This coup d'état seems to have made only happy people. People took to the streets to express their joy and relief. Even Luc Oyoubi, Deputy Secretary General of Bongo's Gabonese Democratic Party, declared: "We knew that change had to come". He pledged his willingness to participate in the transition. He was pleased that Bongo's advisers were in prison. When they were arrested at home, videos showed them in front of suitcases filled with bundles of cash.

This state of grace was also fuelled by the first measures taken by the generals: the dismissal of Marie-Madeleine Mborantsuo, president of the Constitutional Court, mother-in-law of Ali Bongo and nicknamed "The Tower of Pisa" for her decisions always in favour of the government; the release of Jean-Rémy Yama, a trade unionist from the main trade union coalition Dynamique unitaire; the meeting with the opposition platform Alternance 2023; the appointment as head of government of Raymond Ndong Sima, known as an opponent.

New figures for old politics

This coup d'état is not happening because Ali Bongo committed fraud in the elections. He did the same in 2009 and 2016. At the time, there were protests and the army fiercely repressed them. Nguema's power grab is part of the division of the ruling elite. Ali Bongo's stroke in 2018 left him severely weakened. For months, power was held by his wife and her entourage. The rise to power of his son Nouredin Bongo Valentin, who was being groomed to replace his father, was by no means to the liking of the historic Bongo wing represented by his sister Pascaline.

Will the military stay in power forever? Perhaps not. The transition charter states that the members and the head of the government, as well as the presidents of the Assembly and the Senate, may not stand in the next presidential elections, but nowhere does it mention the president of the transition. Rapid elections with no real candidate against Nguema could be an option for restoring the constitution, leaving the system intact for the benefit of French economic and military interests.

However, nothing is set in stone, and the end of the Bongo dynasty could herald another, much more profound change as a result of popular mobilization.

13 September 2023

The end of a dynasty

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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