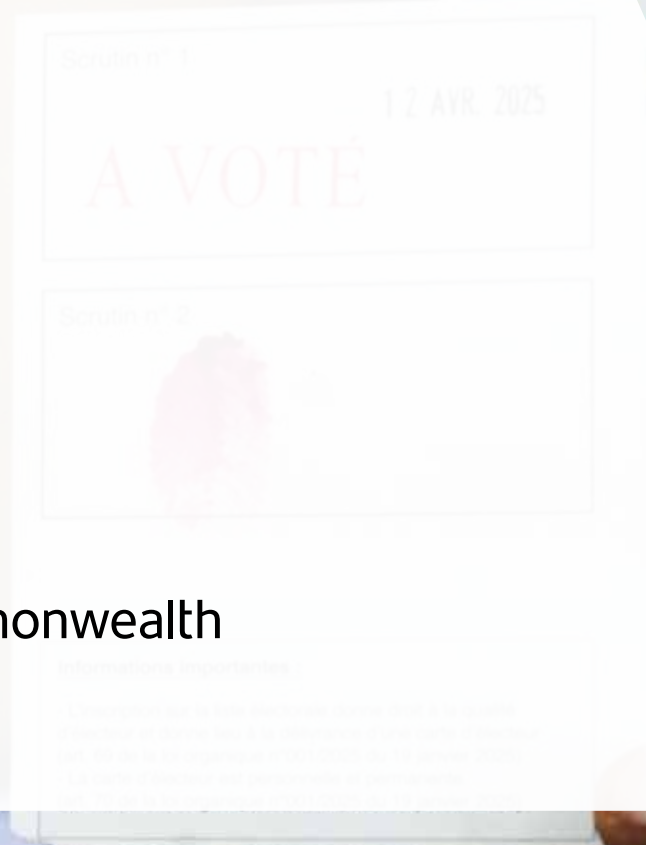


Gabon Presidential Election

12 April 2025



The Commonwealth



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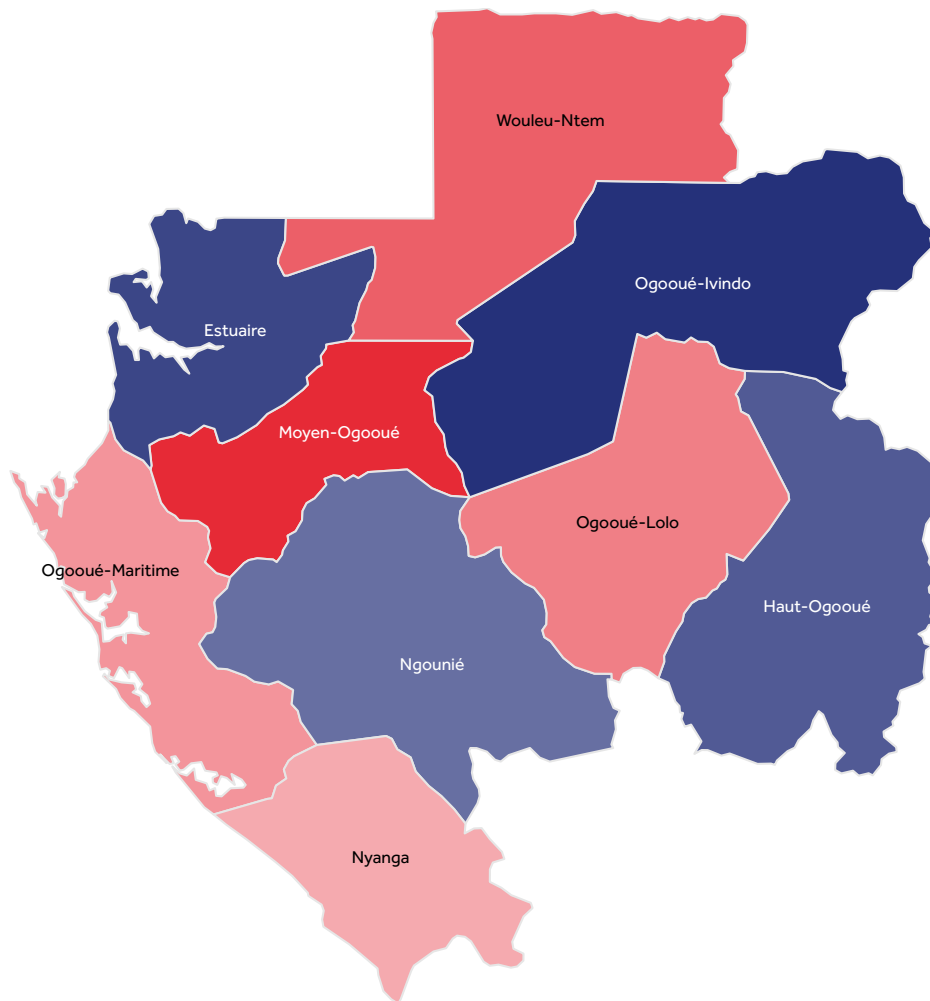
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Map of Gabon



Contents

Map of Gabon	iii
Acronyms and Abbreviations	vii
Letter of Transmittal	1
Observers' Signature Page	3
Executive Summary	5
Recommendations	8
The Campaign and the Media	11
1. Introduction	16
International election observation methodology	16
The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions	16
The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups	17
Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2025 Gabon presidential election	17
Commonwealth Observer Group composition	18
Terms of reference	18
Activities	19
2. Political Context	21
Introduction	21
Recent political history	21
Coup d'état/libération	22
Economic factors	25
The candidates	26
3. Legal Framework and Election Administration	29
Introduction	29
Overview of the constitutional and legal basis for elections	30
Regional and international treaties	35
Election administration: the application of election law in Gabon	38
Importance of compliance with electoral laws	41
Challenges identified in Gabon's legal and institutional framework governing elections	42
4. Participation and Inclusion	48

Introduction	48
Women's participation	49
Youth participation	53
Civil society	55
5. The Campaign and the Media	57
The campaign	57
Media landscape	61
Social media	66
Social media usage during the presidential election campaign	68
6. Voting, Counting and Results	72
Pre-polling procedures	72
Polling procedures	74
Polling in diplomatic and foreign missions	76
Proxy voting	76
Availability and sharing of election data	77
Election day	78
Polling officials, ACER, candidate representatives and observers	78
Voting process	80
Ballot papers	80
Security arrangements	81
Post-election operations	81
Counting process	82
Voter turnout and candidate support	85
Annex I. Biographies of Chairperson and Observers	86
Chairman	86
Annex II. Arrival Statement	90
Annex III. Deployment Plan	92
Annex IV. Interim Statement	93
Introduction	93
Pre-election Environment	94
Election Day	96
Conclusions and Post-election Period	98

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACER	Election and Referendum Control Authority
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CET	Commonwealth Expert Team
CGE	Gabonese Centre for Elections
CMAG	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group
CNOCER	National Commission for the Organisation and Co-ordination of Elections and Referendums
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTRI	Committee for Transition and the Restoration of Institutions
DNI	Inclusive National Dialogue
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organisation
EMB	Election Management Body
HAC	High Authority for Communication
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
PDG	Gabonese Democratic Party
PM	Prime Minister
PWD	Person With Disabilities
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Letter of Transmittal

Commonwealth Observer Group
Gabon Presidential Election
12 April 2025

18 April 2025

Dear Secretary-General,

We wish to express our appreciation for the invitation to observe the 2025 Presidential Election in Gabon, held on 12 April 2025. We have now completed our report and are pleased to submit it to you.

This has been a landmark election in Gabon. We laud the pre-election Voluntary Code of Conduct by the Presidential candidates to foster a peaceful environment during this election. We hope that a spirit of magnanimity and national unity will continue to prevail throughout the current election cycle and beyond, especially as Gabon looks ahead to its legislative and municipal elections later this year.

We commend the people of Gabon for the largely peaceful, calm and orderly manner in which they cast their vote on 12 April 2025. We acknowledge the efforts of the Gabonese authorities in organising this election and undertaking other initiatives, such as the national inclusive dialogue, as part of a series of programmes aimed at strengthening the country's commitment towards an inclusive and participatory democracy.

While we note that the compressed timelines between the change of the legislative framework governing elections, which include the adoption of the new Constitution and the date set for elections, were too short, we nevertheless commend efforts at taking forward reforms, which include the enactment of the Electoral Code in January 2025.

We commend the Ministry of Interior and, in particular, the National Commission for the Organisation and Coordination of Elections and

the Referendum, for successfully organising this election, in line with the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group's mandate to hold credible elections within a maximum of two years from 30 August 2023.

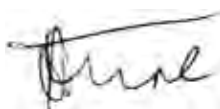
The people of Gabon had high expectations that accompanied this election, and we laud them for their passion and commitment in supporting a peaceful democratic process, and for turning out on Election Day to exercise their franchise.

It has been an honour for the Group to be present in Gabon for this milestone election, as the country continues to progress through its transition.

It is our overall conclusion that this election was peaceful, largely transparent and met key democratic benchmarks, and that any shortcomings highlighted in our report could be addressed through appropriate support.


We trust that our conclusions and recommendations will be received in the constructive spirit in which they are intended, and hope that any appropriate recommendations that may assist in the conduct of the forthcoming legislative and municipal elections will also be considered.

We call upon the Commonwealth Secretariat, other pan-Commonwealth institutions, and international development partners to respond positively to these recommendations.

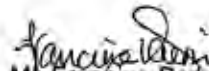


H.E. Danny Antoine Rollen Faure
Chairperson

Observers' Signature Page



Ms Lisa LaFlamme
Media expert
Canada



Ms Francine Baron
Former Foreign Minister
Dominica



Mr Joshua Opey
Chairperson
Commonwealth Youth Council
Ghana



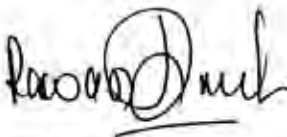
Mr Evans Ogada
Advocate & law lecturer
Kenya



Mrs Gaudence Mushitinyimana
Disability Rights Activist
Rwanda



Mr Mosotho Moepya
Chairperson of the Electoral
Commission of **South Africa**



Mr Amantha Perera
Director
Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma
Asia Pacific
Sri Lanka

Executive Summary

The 12 April 2025 Presidential Election was a significant milestone for Gabon.

Following the coup d'état and the cancellation of the election results by the Committee for Transition and the Restoration of Institutions (CTRI) on 31 August 2023; the swearing-in of a transition government to lead a two-year return to constitutional rule; and the dissolution of state institutions, including the judiciary, Parliament and the Constitutional Assembly, at the 63rd Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG),

Ministers expressed the collective concern of the Commonwealth on the political situation in Gabon, strongly condemned the unconstitutional removal of the elected government from office and called for the restoration of democracy... In accordance with the steps set out in the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration, the Ministers decided to partially suspend Gabon from the Commonwealth pending the restoration of democracy... The Group called upon Gabon as a Commonwealth member, to uphold the values and principles of the Commonwealth and to hold credible elections as soon as possible and within a maximum of two years from 30 August 2023.

Following an invitation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in charge of Sub-Regional Integration and Gabonese Abroad, former Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, constituted a Commonwealth Observer Group (COG or 'the Group') for the Gabon Presidential Election held on 12 April 2025. His Excellency Danny Faure, former President of Seychelles, led the COG, which comprised seven eminent persons with expertise in election management, legal, media, youth and inclusion. The Group was supported by an eight-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

On arrival in Gabon, the COG met with a broad range of key stakeholders to gain a comprehensive picture of the electoral process, the political landscape and the preparations for the presidential election. The COG observed the election campaigns prior to the deadline on 11 April 2025. The COG chair and other members of the COG paid a courtesy call on President Brice Oligui Nguema; the Minister of Foreign Affairs in charge of Sub-Regional Integration and Gabonese Abroad; the Minister of Interior and other Ministry of Interior officials; members of the media; civil society organisation representatives; members of other domestic and international observer groups; and voters. Unfortunately, the COG could not meet with the eight presidential candidates prior to the election as they were out of Libreville campaigning.

The COG was deployed on 10 April 2025 to various locations around Gabon, including Estuaire (Libreville, Akanda and Kango), Moyen-Ogooué (Lambarene), Ngounié (Mouila), Woleu-Ntem (Oyem) and Ogooué-Maritime (Port-Gentil), where it continued its assessment of electoral preparedness. On election day, the COG observed polling stations and witnessed the opening and closing procedures and collation at polling stations.

The key issues for the 2025 Presidential Election included political instability resulting in the unconstitutional removal of President Ali Bongo in August 2023 and the two-year transition period; linkages between some officials in the CTRI with the past administration; high unemployment resulting in widening inequality; rising poverty;

high national debt;¹ economic issues;² lack of diversification and dependency on oil; corruption; and infrastructural challenges. Other issues included the rejection of several presidential applicants by the Ministry of the Interior and the National Commission for the Organisation and Co-ordination of Elections and Referendums (CNO CER); strong territorial, ethnic and cultural diversity;³ restricted political space; voter apathy; and climate (the raining season).

Of vital importance was the outcome of the 2024 constitutional referendum, the introduction of a new Electoral Code and the institutionalisation of the Ministry of Interior as the Election Management Body (EMB) quite close to the election. After a 30-day period of national inclusive dialogue on recommendations for amendments for a new Constitution in April 2024, over 100 recommendations and 194 articles were distilled into 172 articles upon which the referendum was held on 16 November 2024. Key areas of note in the new Constitution include the following:

1. A presidential system with two Vice-Presidents has been established.
2. Neither position is entrenched, and each could be abrogated by constitutional amendment.
3. Under the proposed presidential system, the two Vice-Presidents will de facto occupy the role of Prime Minister (albeit with fewer powers than the current PM), so Gabon's departure from semi-presidentialism largely preserves the architecture and mechanisms of French semi-presidentialism.
4. The Constitution frames the definition of Gabonese nationals and who can run for public and political office.
5. For the first time, there are entrenched presidential term limits, as well as an electoral system for presidential elections.
6. The Constitution bars any constitutional amendment during the 12 months running up to elections, which is meant to stabilise the constitutional framework for elections.
7. The Constitution contains the right to access information.
8. The Constitution also protects privacy rights in relation to physical and electronic communication, although eavesdropping can be authorised by legislation and without a court order.

On 20 January 2025, as part of the broader effort to restore constitutional order following the August 2023 coup, Gabon's transitional parliament adopted a new Electoral Code, establishing the groundwork for the upcoming presidential election. This introduces key measures, including the following:

1. The adoption of an electoral register using biometric technology (Art. 46);
2. The creation of the Election and Referendum Supervisory Authority, an independent governmental body responsible for ensuring the transparency of elections (Art. 30);
3. The establishment of a CNO CER, a body bringing together several ministerial departments to optimise the organisation of elections (Art. 15);

1 CFA 17 billion or US\$26.7 million owed as of 10 January 2025.

2 World Bank suspension of disbursements; public debt reaching 65.6 per cent of gross domestic product in 2022 and projected to exceed 80 per cent in 2025; concerns regarding fiscal stability and default, etc.

3 More than 50 ethnic groups spread across nine provinces.

4. The automatic voter registration of all adult citizens holding a Personal Identification Number (Arts 48, 56);
5. The retention of candidate quotas requiring at least 30 per cent female and 20 per cent youth representation;
6. The capping of election expenditures and financial transparency requirements (Art. 108);
7. The introduction of parliamentary seats for the Gabonese diaspora, with two representatives for Gabonese living abroad (Art. 216);
8. The expanded eligibility for magistrates, Defence and Security Forces officers and senior public accountants to participate in post-transition elections, under specified conditions (Art. 375); and
9. The guaranteed fair access to public media for candidates, with airtime regulated by the communications authority under the Constitutional Court's supervision (Art. 96).

In January 2025, the Minister of the Interior, Hermann Immongault, announced 12 April 2025 as the date for election, four months earlier than originally planned, leaving less than three months for preparation by political parties and independent candidates, and a limited time for campaigns. The Minister of Interior also announced 29 March to 11 April 2025 as the campaign period. Out of 23 applications received for the 2025 presidential elections, only eight were validated, four after challenges at the Constitutional Court. These eight were for Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé, Stéphane Germain Iloko Boussengui, Joseph Lapensée Essingone, Zenaba Gninga Chaning, Thierry Yvon Michel Ngoma, Axel Stophène Ibinga Ibinga and Alain Simplicie Boungoueres. Six of the eight presidential candidates also signed a Voluntary Code of Conduct by 27 March 2025, pledging to uphold the principles of peace, integrity and respect for democratic institutions during the electoral period.⁴

The COG observed polling stations in rural and urban areas across five regions. The COG also observed voting in prisons and commends Gabonese authorities for their progressive decision to allow prisoners on remand to exercise their right to vote. Voting was peaceful and polling procedures were largely followed, with many polling staff carrying out their duties diligently. There were, however, cases of voters not understanding some procedural steps.

Law enforcement played a pivotal role in maintaining security on election day, and queues at polling centres were orderly, although there were considerable variations on how voters were accorded priority. Voters with disabilities, pregnant women and the elderly were generally accorded priority. The Group also noted that, although there was for the most part a gender balance among polling staff, there was an underrepresentation of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) in the locations observed.

There was a gross underrepresentation of representatives of opposition presidential candidates in most polling stations and, in the cases where such representatives were present, they were found predominantly to be representing the incumbent. The COG did, however, witness a robust representation of citizen observers, the Election and Referendum Control Authority (ACER) and international observers deployed

4 International IDEA (2025) 'Gabon: The Code of Good Conduct for Presidential Candidates Reaches a New Goal'. 9 April.

across all of the polling stations visited. Nevertheless, the Group notes with concern the inconsistent and varied levels of access given to and treatment of international observers by law enforcement and electoral officials.

The close of votes and the count were conducted in public and were very methodical. The COG experienced several instances where members of the Group were asked to observe the counting process from outside the polling station, through the window. This is contrary to the Electoral Code, which provides that observers be allowed to witness the counting and tabulation processes inside polling stations. The Group also noted that, when counting had barely commenced, there were already official projections in place of voter turnout and participation rates.

On 14 April 2025, His Excellency Danny Faure, Chair of the COG, issued an Interim Statement (Annex III) highlighting the Group's preliminary findings and observations on the elections. The COG acknowledges and commends the people of Gabon for the peaceful atmosphere that prevailed throughout the elections.

This report provides a thorough account of the COG's observation of the 2025 Gabon presidential election and offers recommendations to strengthen electoral processes further in the country.

Recommendations

Legal Framework and Election Administration

The voters' list

- the Minister of Interior immediately consider affording citizens the opportunity of new voters enlisting their names on the voters' list, currently enlisted voters updating their details where their details have changed since their last enlisting or deceased voters and those wishing to de-register from the list to be provided the opportunity to do so;
- the Minister of Interior consider establishing a timetable to enlist or amend details on the voters' list for all citizens to know the cut-off date for this initiative so that all impacted by it may know the relevant dates and comply;
- a period be included during which the updated list is available for inspection by the public and for corrections to be incorporated before the list is finalised for an election.
- that authorities embark on a publicity campaign to inform and educate the citizens on the need for this initiative and the importance of the dates involved.

Access to the Constitutional Court in presidential elections

- measures taken by the Court in the period leading up to the conduct of the 2025 presidential election be legislated in the Electoral Code to avoid discretion being applied loosely by different justices in that Court in the future;
- an equivalent determination be considered for all the lower courts mandated to deal with election-related cases.

Timeline for Reforms

- future electoral reforms should be introduced well in advance, preferably at least six months before elections, to allow for comprehensive dissemination, training and public awareness campaigns.

Electoral management body structures

- to consider simplifying its EMB structure beyond the transition;
- to consider the necessary measures to enhance the functional independence of its electoral management structures, which will ultimately be the sovereign decision of the Gabonese people.

The role of the ACER

- Should more elections be contemplated imminently, ACER staff's appointment period should be extended and retained, and also thoroughly trained in that period to be ready to execute their mandate more effectively.

Voter List and Data Management

- Consider extending the existing application of biometric registration and identification for voter management to include the implementation of biometric authentication.

Campaign period and funding expenditure limits

(see The Campaign and the Media)

Media

(see The Campaign and the Media)

Participation and Inclusion

Women's participation

- Strengthen the women's movement: Gabonese authorities may wish to consider financially supporting women's rights organisations to educate women on the Constitution, the Electoral Code and their rights to political participation, as well as to provide mentorship for women candidates in the legislative and local elections.
- Increase women's participation in upcoming electoral processes: First, adopt measures to ensure the 30 per cent candidacy quota is achieved. Second, train more women as polling staff with a view to ensuring a greater percentage of polling station presidents are women.
- Ensure gender-sensitive elections: The government should consult with women's rights organisations to consistently identify meaningful gender-sensitive affirmative actions, such as priority voting for pregnant and older women, to be considered for inclusion as binding provisions in the Electoral Code.
- Collect and disaggregate data on voter registration, turnout and polling staff by gender, age and disability.

Participation of persons with disabilities

- Adopt a comprehensive stand-alone law protecting the rights of PWDs.
- Consider completing ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa.³⁷

- Establish permanent mechanisms at the national and local levels for participation and consultation with DPOs in relation to law- and policy-making and ensure the function of the National Committee for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities.
- Provide DPOs with sufficient continuous financial resources to ensure they can provide policy-makers with information on the needs and views of PWDs so they may be meaningfully taken into account in future planning processes.
- Ensure the inclusion and participation of PWDs in the electoral process: Gabonese authorities should consider amending the Electoral Code to include candidacy quota for PWDs as it currently does for youth and women. Additionally, Gabonese authorities should consider setting a quota system for PWDs as staff in all electoral structures (electoral commission, ACER) and decision-making processes, and ensure priority is accorded to voters with disabilities through a legally binding provision. Training of polling staff is recommended to raise awareness of PWDs and address specific needs and persisting discriminatory practices and attitudes. Alternative methods of voting could be provided to PWDs, such as mobile voting, online voting or allowing PWDs to vote from their place of residence.
- Consider putting in place frameworks and tools to regularly monitor the accessibility of elections. For example, through consultation and active involvement of DPOs, an election accessibility checklist tool should be developed and regularly implemented prior to all elections.
- Consider the collection of voter data disaggregated by age, gender and disability.
- To the extent possible, reproduce laws (e.g. Constitution, Electoral Code), electoral guidelines and voting materials in accessible and easy-to-read formats (e.g. large print, braille) and ensure sign language is provided.

Youth participation

- The National Youth Council could be given the requisite support by the government and development partners to enable them to play their rightful role in engaging young people in the electoral process.
- Election organising institutions and stakeholders should have specific arrangements to engage with youth groups at every phase of the electoral process.
- Candidates for elections should engage young people among the stakeholders consulted in developing their campaign policies.
- Election-organising institutions and other stakeholders should work with youth bodies like the National Youth Council and student unions to implement election awareness-raising campaigns that target young people and reach every young person.
- Mainstream media should consider providing spaces for young people to have their voices heard by engaging them as panellists in sessions related to current affairs.

Civil society

- Support for CSOs in Gabon could be enhanced.
- CSOs might want to consider using their platforms to play their critical role as impartial and neutral contributors to development rather than as platform arenas for candidates.
- Development partners could consider providing capacity-building programmes for CSOs focusing on standard civil society ethics.
- Internal accountability mechanisms and codes of conduct for CSOs could be reinforced to prevent partisan bias and maintain public confidence in their activities.

The Campaign and the Media

The Campaign

- In accordance with international good practice, elections should not be called within six months of major changes to the legislative framework for elections. This would allow for proper sensitisation of all stakeholders on the content and important changes, and for adequate provisions to be made for training and education.
- Adequate time should be given for an election campaign, in line with international good practice. Given Gabon's logistical constraints, a longer campaign period was crucial to ensuring fair competition and counterbalancing the inherent advantages of incumbents or well-resourced candidates.
- Provisions on campaign finance and restrictions on the use of state resources in an election campaign should be strictly adhered to.
- The authorities should consider lowering the campaign expenditure limits from current levels. In this regard, the Group recommends that the campaign limits be brought within the limits applicable in the region or benchmark the most appropriate limits relevant to the Gabonese circumstances.
- Authorities should provide for a regular filing of campaign expenditure limits with the relevant authority and publish such a determination together with a notice calling and setting a date for each election.
- Clear, enforceable rules around campaign finance and political advertising should be introduced, including on:
 - potential state funding for political parties and independent candidates to create fair competition;
 - a cap on paid media placements per candidate;
 - mandatory disclosure of media ad spending;
 - public financing or media vouchers to ensure all candidates can access essential media platforms.

Media landscape

Strengthen legal protections for journalists through:

- a journalists' protection law that explicitly prohibits arbitrary detention, harassment or surveillance for reporting;
- a confidential whistleblower system for media professionals to report censorship or intimidation;
- legal support services for journalists facing threats.

Legal framework for media coverage:

The HAC should consider rigorously enforcing and monitoring compliance with equal airtime laws during election campaigns. This includes:

- real-time audits of coverage time across media outlets;
- public release of weekly media balance reports during campaigns;
- penalties for non-compliance, including fines or temporary suspension of broadcast licences.

Biased media coverage:

We encourage the creation of an appropriate, independent, multistakeholder body that includes journalists, civil society and observers to:

- monitor political coverage across media platforms;
- investigate and report media bias or censorship in real time;
- provide protective backing for journalists reporting on sensitive issues.

Coverage of marginalised groups:

- We encourage media outlets to dedicate a minimum percentage of coverage to marginalised groups and their specific needs, particularly during election cycles.
- Sign language interpretation should be required on major political broadcasts.
- Training for journalists on inclusive reporting practices should be funded and supported.

Environment for reporters:

- Increase access to information for journalists, which could include:
- journalists' right to access public data and official records;
- government agencies responding to media inquiries within a specified timeframe;
- all ministries having dedicated media liaison officers;
- regular press briefings during the electoral period.
- Establish ongoing journalism training programmes, focused on electoral reporting, including:
- workshops on ethical reporting, fact-checking and combating disinformation;
- mentorship opportunities with experienced political reporters;

- partnerships with international media training organisations to share best practices.

Social Media

- In line with international good practice, Gabonese authorities may wish to consider introducing guidelines or legislation to address misinformation, disinformation, abusive content, harassing content, unauthorised releases and compromising personal details on social media, particularly during election campaigns.

Voting, Counting and Results

Proxy voting

- Retain the proxy voting franchise in the Electoral Code.
- Consider making provisions in the Electoral Code to accommodate the needs of Gabonese citizens with disabilities, the bedridden, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. in a way that will allow them to cast their votes themselves and in secrecy.
- Strengthen the administration of proxy voting applications to ensure such voters are not easily disenfranchised.

Availability and sharing of election data

- The CNOCER should consider assessing the information needs of its stakeholders in an election and seek to make such data available on media accessible to its stakeholders (e.g., Ministry or CNOCER website, regular press briefings or statements, etc.).

Election day:

Polling officials, ACER, candidate representatives and observers

- All polling staff should be clearly identifiable, and this should be applied evenly across all polling stations. This will allow voters and observers to readily confirm the officials' legitimacy and designated roles, thereby reinforcing the integrity of the polling procedures.
- Provide all election staff with comprehensive, user-friendly manuals or quick-reference materials that clearly delineate standardised procedures. These documents should offer systematic, step-by-step guidance for routine tasks – such as verifying voter eligibility, distributing ballots and resolving disputes – thereby reducing ambiguity and promoting consistent adherence to established protocols.
- The ACER or a future independent body should routinely conduct unannounced spot checks to evaluate staff compliance with established procedures and offer real-time corrective guidance as needed. Persistent non-compliance or recurrent errors should be systematically recorded and remedied through formal feedback mechanisms or appropriate disciplinary actions.

- Conduct voter education initiatives that proactively inform citizens about the anticipated identification and responsibilities of polling staff, as well as the official mechanisms for reporting discrepancies. Such measures will enable voters to recognise and appropriately raise concerns regarding any improperly trained or unauthorised individuals at polling stations.
- Sustained voter education initiatives should be conducted through multiple channels to ensure citizens are fully informed of their rights and electoral procedures. These measures would help foster a more inclusive, transparent and credible electoral environment.
- Election observers and civil society groups should continue to be encouraged to observe the electoral process to enhance transparency and accountability.

Voting process

- The Minister and the relevant Gabonese authorities to consider retaining all the structures that are necessary for the conduct of elections, in anticipation of the imminent legislative and local government elections.
- Debrief on the 2025 voting process and implement the lessons learnt in preparing for the immediate next round of elections.

Ballot papers

- Consider the adoption of a unified ballot to enhance clarity, reduce voter confusion and ensure greater efficiency in both the casting and the counting of votes.
- Consider replacing manual verification with modern or alternative solutions, such as stamping, barcodes, digital watermarking or blockchain, for more secure, transparent and efficient verification.
- Consider adopting cryptographic verification techniques, such as digitally signed ballots or biometric authentication, which can provide more precise and tamper-proof confirmation of voter identity.
- Consider implementing secure voter authentication protocols, including two-factor verification, should be implemented to prevent unauthorised individuals from submitting fraudulent ballots.

Security arrangements

- security arrangements should be carefully calibrated to ensure they do not discourage participation; law enforcement presence should be discreet, professional and strictly neutral, with clear guidelines to prevent any perception of coercion.

Counting process

- Enhanced training on provisions of the Electoral Code relating to observation of the counting process should be provided to polling staff, to ensure consistency in application.

Tabulation, collation and dissemination of election results

- Electoral management officials and institutions should rigorously observe legally prescribed timelines for consolidating and announcing results. Well-defined procedures should be implemented to eliminate unwarranted delays, while contingency plans must be prepared to mitigate logistical or technical challenges. Any such measures must ensure they uphold the highest standards of transparency and public trust.
- Provisional results should be made available to the public in real time via secure digital platforms, enabling stakeholders to monitor the tabulation process at every stage. Additionally, comprehensive breakdowns by polling unit, along with promptly published scanned copies of result sheets, should be provided to support independent verification and ensure accountability.
- A standardised framework for disseminating results should be established, facilitating consistent and legally sound public communications. All official announcements should be distributed through authorised and verified channels, with regular updates provided to uphold transparency and sustain stakeholder trust.
- Accredited independent observers should conduct post-election audits to examine the tabulation process, with their findings promptly disclosed to the public. Additionally, electoral authorities should consider implementing effective grievance redress mechanisms to resolve any disputes stemming from delays or irregularities in the transmission of results.
- Capacity-building initiatives for officials tasked with result collation should be strengthened. This entails implementing comprehensive training programmes designed to improve operational efficiency, ensure precision and deepen understanding of transparency protocols. Additionally, integrating technological solutions can significantly reduce manual errors and streamline procedures, fostering greater confidence in electoral outcomes.
- Institutionalise regular briefings for political parties, civil society representatives, and the media throughout the tabulation process, enabling timely oversight and fostering trust.
- Public awareness initiatives that educate citizens on electoral procedures can further strengthen accountability and reinforce the integrity of the process.

Post-election dispute resolution

- A lengthier period for dispute resolution by the courts should be considered, as this extended timeframe would align with international good practice, which emphasises the importance of allowing sufficient opportunity for meaningful judicial review in democratic elections.

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter aims to provide readers with a background and context in which Commonwealth Observer Groups (COGs) operate. It starts with a summary of the COG methodology and concludes with an overview of the methodology applied to the 2025 presidential election in Gabon.

International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed over 200 elections in 40 countries. International election observation serves several purposes, including:

- promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process;
- deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud;
- enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results;
- diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation; and
- strengthening international standards on electoral good practices.

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following:

1. COGs are independent, including of the Secretariat
 'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'
2. Observers, not monitors
 Unlike some citizen observer groups (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers – as with all international observers – cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.
3. Taking forward COG recommendations
 The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms,' such as multistakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a COG.
4. Whole-of-election-cycle approach
 Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of Election Management Body (EMB) staff,

the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and, crucially, bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups

While all international election observer missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics:

1. Eminent observers

While COGs are smaller in size than some other international observer missions, they comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts. The biographies of all the observers can be found in Annex I.

2. Diversity and peer-to-peer learning

COGs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers selected from each of the world's five continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.

3. Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices

COGs are normally chaired by a former Head of State or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of a number of factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows COG chairs to enter into a 'Good Offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such Good Offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the 2019 Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat website.

Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2025 Gabon presidential election

The former Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, constituted a COG (or 'Group') for the Gabon Presidential Election held on 12 April 2025, following an invitation from His Excellency Michel Régis Onanga Ndiaye, Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Secretary-General's decision was informed by a Commonwealth Expert Team (CET) assessment of the 2024 Referendum on the Constitution of Gabon, and the mandate of the 63rd Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) calling on:

'Gabon as a Commonwealth member, to uphold the values and principles of the Commonwealth and to hold credible elections as soon as possible and within a maximum of two years from 30 August 2023.'

Commonwealth Observer Group composition

The COG was led by His Excellency Danny Faure, former President of the Republic of Seychelles. The Group comprised seven eminent persons drawn from across seven Commonwealth member countries, representing the four regions of the Commonwealth. Its members bring together a diversity of experience in the fields of election management, law, diplomacy, civil society, politics, human rights and the media, among others. The Group was supported by an eight-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members can be found in Annex I.

Terms of reference

The mandate and agreed terms of reference for the Group were as follows:

- The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.
- The Group will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the member country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth, including its Charter, and other international commitments.
- The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.



Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Front row: Evans Ogada (Kenya), Amantha Perera (Sri Lanka), HE Dr Danny Faure (COG Chair, Seychelles), Lisa LaFlamme (Canada), Hon Francine Baron (Dominica)

Back row: Gaudence Mushimiyimana (Rwanda), Mosotho Moepya (South Africa), Joshua Opey (Ghana)



Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group with the Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team
 Front row: Evans Ogada (Kenya), Musu Kaikai (staff), HE Dr Danny Faure (COG Chair, Seychelles), Linford Andrews (staff team leader), Hon Francine Baron (Dominica)
 Second row: Abiola Sunmonu (staff), Gaudence Mushimiyimana (Rwanda), Amantha Perera (Sri Lanka), Mosotho Moepya (South Africa), Lisa LaFlamme (Canada), Joshua Opey (Ghana)
 Back row: Fredrick Sigala (staff), Penina Shipley (staff), Justin Pettit (staff)

- The Group is to submit a report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of the Republic of Gabon, political leaders and thereafter all Commonwealth member governments.

Activities

The Group was in Gabon from 4 April to 18 April 2025. Its Arrival Statement was issued on 7 April 2025 (Annex II).

The Group met with a broad range of stakeholders, including the Ministers of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Justice, as well as the President of the Constitutional Court, plus representatives of the National Commission on Human Rights, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), the diplomatic community, the United Nations, the media and a diverse range of civil society organisations (CSOs), representing women, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs), to gain an understanding of the pre-election environment and preparations for this election. The COG also established working relationships and exchanged information with other international and domestic observer groups. This was to provide the group with a holistic and broad perspective of the electoral process.

On 10 April 2025, members of the Group were deployed to various locations around Gabon, including Estuaire (Libreville, Akanda and Kango), Moyen-Ogooué (Lambarene), Ngounié (Mouila), Woleu-Ntem (Oyem and Bitam) and Ogooué-Maritime (Port-Gentil). On deployment, they received further briefings at the regional level from representatives of the Ministry of Interior and from Governors. The deployment plan can be found in Annex II.



Observers and staff prior to deployment from Libreville on 10 April 2025

On 12 April 2015, the COG observed the voting, counting and results process in their various areas of deployment.

The Chair of the Group issued an Interim Statement (Annex IV) on 14 April 2025. The Statement highlighted the Group's preliminary findings and observations. The Chair commended the Ministry of Interior and the CNOCER, polling staff, candidates, law enforcement, civil society and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections in Gabon. He also highlighted areas for improvement. The Chair of the COG paid a courtesy call on President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema on 15 April 2025.

The final report, drafted in Libreville, was concluded after the departure of the Group on 18 April 2025.

2. Political Context

Introduction

This chapter provides a political context for the 2025 presidential election in Gabon. In assessing the electoral conditions and the preparedness of Gabon for these elections, and the recommendations that the Group makes in the ensuing chapters, it is essential to understand Gabon's political, ethno-cultural and historical framework.

The 2025 presidential election was unique for various reasons and included many firsts for Gabon. It was the first election that the Commonwealth had been invited to observe since Gabon joined the Commonwealth of Nations in June 2022. It was the first time in over 55 years not to have an immediate Bongo family member on the ballot or a candidate from the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), the political party that has played a decisive role in the country's political tapestry since 1967. More importantly, these elections mark a key milestone in the transitional agenda for Gabon and its citizens as the country emerges from a military orchestrated coup d'état, popularly referred to by the Gabonese people as a 'coup de libération' and decides the next chapter of its governance and political administration.

Recent political history

The August 2023 presidential election and the political conditions that led to the coup is a pivotal comparator against which to analyse the 12 April 2025 presidential election.

The lead-up to the 2023 presidential election saw the incumbent president, Ali Bongo Ondimba, in the 14th year of his rule, seeking a third mandate, changing the term limit in the 2023 elections from the usual seven-year term to five years.⁵ He had come to power in 2009 after his father, Omar Bongo, passed away after a 41-year rule. There were initially 13 opposition candidates in the run-up to the 2023 presidential election. However, about two weeks before the election, eight candidates along with trades unions and the civil society bloc coalesced their support around one main candidate, 69-year-old economic professor and former minister Albert Ondo Ossa, under the banner of 'Alternance 2023.' The coalition was intended to result in a stronger, more viable opponent to the incumbent.

The 2023 election was, however, reportedly marred by numerous irregularities, arrests and human rights violations. The opposition accused the administration of orchestrating a fraudulent electoral exercise and formalised its complaints in a letter addressed to international partners, notably the United Nations. It expressed concerns about the lack of transparency of the election, the lack of invitation or accreditation of citizen and international observers and the subsequent internet and media censorship.

The media regulator (HAC) and the then Communications Minister, Mboumba Bissawou, instituted a media blackout on election day, supposedly to curb the spread of misinformation and disinformation and to protect the nation from violence and anarchy. Foreign media were restricted from election coverage, and the operations

5 Europe1 (2023) « Gabon : coup d'État militaire après l'annonce de la victoire d'Ali Bongo à la présidentielle ». 30 August.

of three prominent French media agencies (RFI, TV5 and France 24) were suspended during that period on the purported basis of the lack of objectivity and fairness in their coverage.

Coup d'état/libération

On 29 August 2023 the Gabonese Centre for Elections (CGE) completed its vote tabulation and President Ali Bongo-Ondimba was declared the winner, with 64.27 per cent of the vote, with the opposition parties' coalition candidate Albert Ondo Ossa said to have obtained 30.77 per cent of the vote. The military announced soon after to the nation that it had taken power and cancelled the election results. This bloodless coup d'état came to be called a 'coup de libération' by Gabonese citizens.

A group of 12 members of the Republican Guard headed by General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, calling themselves the Committee for Transition and the Restoration of Institutions (CTRI), announced to the people that the military had taken over, dissolving state institutions including the judiciary, Parliament, the CGE and the Constitutional Assembly. They also closed the borders of Gabon. This effectively ended the Bongo family's 55-year hold on power in Gabon.

The junta placed the incumbent President, Ali Bongo Ondimba, under immediate house surveillance. The CTRI made it clear that he was not being charged for any crimes but that this was for his own protection. The former first Lady, Sylvia Bongo-Ondimba, the former first son, Nourredine Bongo-Valentin, and some close associates and members of the PDG were placed under arrest and charged with various offences, including fraud, embezzlement, corruption and drug trafficking, among other charges. At the time of writing this report, these cases were still pending adjudication.

A curfew and an internet and media blackout were imposed.

This coup was not the first that Gabon had experienced in its history, and neither was it the first for the region: it was another in a series of coups that Francophone Africa was experiencing at the time in short order, with transition military governments having been installed in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. What made the military takeover of government in Gabon in 2023 unique was its bloodless and swift nature. The announcement by the military was celebrated on the streets in all quarters of Gabonese society and across the political spectrum, and the military were regarded as 'liberators' and 'saviours,' hence the reference to the coup as a 'coup de libération.'

General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema was named as the country's transitional leader, and on 4 September 2023 he was sworn in as Interim President of Gabon and head of the transitional government. A transition government was also sworn in, consisting of members of former opposition parties and civil society. Raymond Ndong, a former opposition party leader, was then named Interim Prime Minister. He announced a two-year timeline for a return to constitutional rule, to include a nationwide consultation of national dialogue on the Constitution, a referendum on the Constitution and elections, all to be undertaken before 30 August 2025.

Within a week of taking power, the military swiftly consulted various actors, including businesses, unions, the diplomatic corps, political stakeholders, and domestic and international partners. These latter included the Commonwealth, whose Secretary-General was the first international partner on the ground, a week after the military takeover.

The transition government reassured both national and international partners that Gabon was open for business and that it would abide by its treaty obligations. It stated the following as key priorities: reforming national institutions and ensuring the inclusivity of all Gabonese citizens and stakeholders who had the best interest of Gabon.

The international community for the most part issued statements to condemn the unconstitutional takeover of government. Regional and other international partners such as the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) decided to (initially) fully suspend Gabon from its membership, with all but the African Union later reinstating Gabon's membership and full privileges.

The Commonwealth decided to partially suspend Gabon from its membership, which meant excluding senior government officials from all Commonwealth ministerial meetings but enabling technical assistance support for Gabon, among other privileges. The CMAG further mandated that Gabon hold credible elections within a maximum of two years from 30 August 2023.

Within six months of assuming power, the CTRI communicated its two-year timeline for returning the country to democracy/constitutional order. This timeline or 'chronogram' included the creation of a Transition Charter, which recognised French and English as the official languages of Gabon and included a provision that no member of cabinet in the transitional government could run for government in the elections to be held during the transition to determine the next government.

The Charter made provision for a transitional National Assembly that included representation from civil society, political parties and traditional leaders, with consideration given to regional and (to an extent) gender representation. Cabinet members were chosen for the most part from the previous administration. A new president of the Constitutional Court was also chosen.

Another key milestone for the CTRI was the conduct of a month-long Inclusive National Dialogue (DNI) process in April 2023. The objective of this dialogue was to enable a consultation process by the transitional government to determine and shape the key priorities and mandates of the government according to citizens, with the intent of understanding the amendments needed for the 1991 Gabonese Constitution.

The national dialogue on the Constitution gave Gabonese citizens an opportunity to share their views. A platform was created whereby citizens could submit any comments that they had. It is reported that 38,000 contributions were received. The national dialogue took place between 3 and 30 August 2024 and included a wide range of stakeholders, such as politicians, CSOs and unions. While it is generally thought that this was an inclusive process, though, some persons and groups claimed that they were denied participation.

More than a thousand recommendations were submitted in the process, some of which were immediate-term strategies and others of which were more long term. These were categorised and distilled by the Prime Minister (PM) in consultation with the National Assembly and the Constitutional Court to form the basis of the Draft Constitution, submitted for the approval of the people through a referendum announced for November 2024.

Some of the notable recommendations were the following:

1. that a new constitution be adopted by referendum;
2. that the power for organising and managing elections return to the Ministry of the Interior;
3. that election observers, particularly CSOs, be allowed to observe elections; and
4. that sanctions for breach of the Electoral Code should be more stringent.

On 16 November 2024, the referendum was held to adopt the new Constitution. It was adopted, according to the proclamation by the President of the Constitutional Court, with a 91.64 per cent vote in favour, with 8.20 per cent against it, and 54.18 per cent voter turnout.⁶ On 2 January 2025, an extraordinary meeting of Parliament was called to receive the draft Electoral Code, which was adopted on 20 January 2025. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Two days after this, 12 April 2025 was announced as the date for the presidential election.

The CTRI was lauded for its inclusive governance and the consultative and accelerated steps it took towards returning to democratic governance, which marked a significant departure from other similar coups in the region. However, there was not a total absence of criticisms of the CTRI. The Group was told by some stakeholders that the DNI was not as consultative a process as it was deemed to be, as participants who represented a cross-section of Gabonese society were predetermined and hand-picked to participate by the transition government, with some groups not allowed to participate. Some critics also mentioned the accelerated nature of the transition milestones, which did not allow for thoughtful consideration and in-depth civic sensitisation and engagement to understand the proposed constitutional amendments, to enable citizens to make informed decisions on the referendum.

The proposed amendments to the 1991 Constitution were perceived by some as a move to consolidate power by General Nguema. The Constitution and the legal framework for the 2025 presidential election are analysed in more details in subsequent chapters. However, it is worth noting that key areas of the Constitution, particularly redefinition of the requirement of Gabonese citizenship to stand for

6 Gabonactu (2024) « Résultats définitifs du référendum : Réduction mineure du taux de plébiscite du 'Oui', 91,64% et hausse substantielle du taux de participation, 54,18% ». 29 November.



Heads of international observer missions pay a courtesy call on HE President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, Libreville, after election day

public office, age restrictions, allowing military personnel to run for office, abolition of the PM position and changing the length of the presidential term back to seven years, albeit renewable once, were all perceived by some critics as being an orchestration by the transitional president to provide a favourable framework for him to establish his candidacy for presidency.

There were also criticisms levelled at the composition of General Nguema's transition administration. This was made up largely of players from the former government. Some stakeholders expressed concern that General Nguema had familial ties to the Bongo family, which in their eyes made him a Bongo by extension. The fact that he had worked as a personal guard and military attaché to the Gabonese Embassy in Morocco, under President Omar Bongo, and as head of the presidential guard under President Ali Bongo Ondimba, meant that some felt he was essentially part of the old guard. Some critics held the view that he had been responsible for some of the governance issues levelled against previous administrations, such as the repression of civil society space, lack of press freedom and corruption.

One of the decisions announced by Transitional President Nguema was that the military would hand over power to a civilian administration within two years. His decision to run as a civilian candidate in the 2025 presidential election was controversial and regarded as a move to consolidate power.

Economic factors

Economic factors were also important elements in this election, including the need to attract investment and increase investor confidence in the country. Gabon is a small country of about 2.5 million people, and rich in mineral resources. Eighty-eight per cent of its landmass is covered by the biodiverse Congo Basin, hence its potential as a wood exporter and for carbon-neutral initiatives is large.⁷ It is, however, oil-dependent: oil accounts for about 38 per cent of the country's revenue. Gabon also has a quarter of the world's deposits of manganese.

Despite Gabon's mineral resources, the country faces infrastructural challenges, disparities in income and poverty, which have threatened its economic sustainability. Sixty per cent of its population is under the age of 35 and an estimated 40 per cent of the youth population is unemployed. The World Bank estimates that a third of the population is living under US\$5.50 per day.

In January 2025, the World Bank announced that Gabon's public debt stood at US\$27 million⁸ and the potential for the country to default on upcoming debt payments was high. Coupled with this, the post-Covid economic recovery, low oil revenues, allegations of state capture and historical corruption were key factors for candidates in the election.

The populace was looking to ride on the wave of renewed hope and the prospect of change that the coup brought.

Stakeholders spoke to observers about gaps in social services and infrastructure provision, particularly outside of the capital city; chronic water and electricity shortages; and the need for sustainable social services and human skills

7 World Bank (2022) 'Everyday Champions in Gabon Are Helping Turn the Tide in the Fight against Climate Change'. Feature Story, 31 August.

8 African Economics International Law Network (2025) 'Gabon: World Bank Suspends Disbursements Over Arrears'. Sovereign Debt News Update 130, 24 February.

development. The 2025 presidential election was therefore not just about political change but also about prospects for economic renewal and growth that would translate into tangible outcomes for its citizens.

The candidates

Following the 22 March 2025 deadline for the submission of nominations for the 12 April presidential election, Interior Minister Hermann Immongault announced the names of the successful candidates, in accordance with provisions of the Transition Charter, the Constitution of 19 December 2024 and the Electoral Code. On 9 March 2025, the Minister of Interior and the President of the National Commission for the Organization and Control of Elections and the Referendum (CNOCER) unveiled the names of the candidates approved for the presidential election. Four were initially approved, with four more approved by the Constitutional Court of Gabon on 27 March 2025, to a total of eight candidates, seven of whom were male. None of the candidates represented a political party.

Table 2.1: The candidates were:

Alain Simplicie BOUNGOUERES
Stéphane Germain Iloko BOUSSENGUI
Zenaba Gninga CHANING
Joseph Lapensée ESSINGONE
Axel Stophène IBINGA IBINGA
Thierry Yvon Michel NGOMA
Brice Clotaire Oligui NGUEMA
Alain-Claude Bilie BY NZÉ

Alain Simplicie Bounboueres

A civil engineer by profession, Alain Simplicie Bounboueres was Secretary-General of the Ministry of Industry from February 2000 to February 2025. He was also President of the Commission on the Communication of Information and Digital Technologies in the National Assembly of Gabon from February 2019 to August 2023. From 2019, he was Secretary-General of the parliamentary network for the management of the forest ecosystem in Central Africa, responsible for Gabon. He has also been knighted as an Officer in the order of the Equatorial Star, and he was given the Gabonese Order of Merit in 2008. He has a Certificate on State Governance in Social Sciences from the University of Beijing and an Executive Diploma in Business Administration.

Stéphane Germain Iloko Boussengui

A doctor by training, Stéphane Germain Iloko Boussengui is a former member and spokesperson for the PDG of former President Ali Bongo. As Inspector General of Health, he has expressed concerns about Gabon’s health indicators. He split from Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé’s ‘Ensemble pour le Gabon’ (‘Together for Gabon’) to form the ‘Rassemblement Arc-en-ciel’ movement. It is under the banner of this movement that he ran for the presidential election.

Zenaba Gninga Chaning

The only female among the eight candidates in Gabon's 2025 presidential election, Zenaba Gninga Chaning is from Mayumba in Southern Gabon. She advocated for a vision of 'a united and prosperous Gabon.' A businesswoman trained in France, she presented herself as the candidate of renewal and promised more modern and inclusive governance.

Joseph Lapensée Essingone

Joseph Lapensée Essingone is a manager at the General Directorate of Taxation. After completing his primary and secondary education at Missanga Catholic School in Ndjolé, Ndjolé Secondary School and Estuaire State High School, he earned a Baccalaureate (B series) in 1994. He holds a Master's in Public Law from Omar Bongo University and a Master's in Public Finance, Social Security and Taxation from Jean Moulin University Lyon.

Axel Stophène Ibinga Ibinga

Born in Port-Gentil, Axel Stophène Ibinga Ibinga is a Gabonese entrepreneur with 17 years of experience in the business world, and also a previous candidate in the 2023 presidential election. He is head of Ax Capital Investment Gabon, an investment company set up in 2020. His platform slogan rallied around 'La République au travail', 'The Republic at work,' which proposed a radical break from past practices. His vision and platform for Gabon was to create jobs for the Gabonese people and develop the country's economy. His vision was based on nine key principles, which symbolically represent the nine provinces of the country and concern the family, moral and civic education, citizenship, youth, justice, ethics, the prison system (social rehabilitation and reformation in prisons and the creation of separate prisons for men, women and children) and the economy (taxation, debt and public spending). He wanted to reduce the allowances of senior civil servants as well as former prime ministers.



Heads of international observer missions after their courtesy call on HE President Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, Libreville, after election day

Thierry Yvon Michel Ngoma

Thierry Yvon Michel Ngoma is a human resources administrator who ran on a vision of solidarity and equality. He campaigned for Gabon to promote the social well-being of its citizens. His platform was focused on free and accessible essential services, promising free healthcare in the country's hospitals if he won.

Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema

Trained at the Royal Military Academy in Meknes, Morocco, Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema first served as aide-de-camp to President Omar Bongo. After the 2009 presidential election and Ali Bongo's victory, he was appointed military attaché to the Gabonese embassies in Morocco and Senegal.

In October 2019, he was recalled to Gabon to head the General Directorate of Special Services, the intelligence unit of the Republican Guard. In April 2020, he became Commander-in-Chief of the Republican Guard, replacing General Grégoire Kouna, before being promoted to brigadier general. In August 2023, General Nguema was appointed President of the CTRL.

Alain-Claude Bilie-By-Nzé

From Makokou, Gabon, Alain-Claude Bilie-By-Nzé, graduated from the Police Cadet High School. He then pursued literature studies at Omar Bongo University in Libreville. Following his expulsion from university, he entered politics after founding the Gabonese Student Union.

He held various ministerial positions in the Gabonese government between 2006 and 2023, including Minister Delegate, Minister of Communication, Minister of State, Minister of the Digital Economy, Minister of Culture and the Arts, Minister of Sports, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Energy, Deputy Prime Minister and PM, replacing Rose Ossouka Raponda. He remained in office until August 2023.

The election campaign officially began on 29 March 2025.

3. Legal Framework and Election Administration

Introduction

This chapter examines the legal and institutional framework governing elections in Gabon, focusing on the constitutional provisions, electoral laws and administrative bodies responsible for organising and overseeing electoral processes. Elections are a cornerstone of democratic governance, and their credibility depends largely on the robustness of the legal structures and the impartiality of the institutions that administer them.

In Gabon, the electoral framework is shaped by the national Constitution, statutory laws and regulatory mechanisms that define the rules for conducting elections. Key institutions, such as the Ministry of Interior and the Constitutional Court, play critical roles in ensuring electoral integrity. This chapter analyses the constitutional foundations of electoral governance, the legislative provisions guiding election administration, and the powers and functions of the bodies tasked with managing elections. By assessing these elements, the chapter seeks to provide an understanding of how Gabon's electoral system is structured and the extent to which it upholds democratic principles.

Figure 3.1: The geographic spread of commissions and polling stations in Gabon



Source: Ministry of Interior.

The legal framework for elections encompasses all laws, regulations and related legal or quasi-legal documents governing the electoral process. This includes constitutional provisions, legislative electoral laws and other statutes affecting elections. It also covers regulations issued by the government under electoral or other relevant laws, as well as directives and instructions from the EMB. Additionally, the framework may involve codes of conduct, whether voluntary or mandatory, that directly or indirectly influence elections.⁹

Gabon's electoral process is governed by a legal framework that is reasonably clear. Election procedures in Gabon are based on the country's constitutional provisions and the Electoral Code. Additionally, Gabon has ratified international and regional treaties that may impact its electoral laws.

Overview of the constitutional and legal basis for elections

The key legal instruments regulating elections in Gabon are as follows.

The constitutional framework

Article 4 of the Constitution establishes the fundamental principles governing elections, declaring that suffrage is universal, equal and secret. Additionally, it specifies that voting may be conducted either directly or indirectly, in accordance with the conditions set forth by the Constitution or by law. This provision guarantees that all citizens have the right to participate in elections under fair and transparent conditions, whether through direct voting or through representative mechanisms, as legally prescribed.

9 International IDEA (2002) *International Electoral Standards: Guidelines for Reviewing the Legal Framework of Elections*.



The COG Chair and members of the Group with Hon Hermann Immongault, Gabon's Minister of Interior and Security (centre), following a briefing on preparations for the presidential election

Article 6 of the Constitution affirms that legally established political parties and alliances play a vital role in facilitating democratic participation by helping organise and express the will of voters. These parties and groupings must adhere to the principles of pluralism and participatory democracy, ensuring diverse political representation. Additionally, they have the freedom to establish themselves and function independently, provided they operate within the framework of the law. This provision safeguards political pluralism while ensuring party activities remain lawful and democratic. Article 6 further stipulates that the state shall ensure equal opportunities for women, men, youth and PWDs to run for political office, in accordance with legal provisions. Additionally, the state is required to provide financial support to political parties under conditions determined by law. Fundamentally, this article also upholds the right to democratic opposition, as defined and regulated by legal frameworks.

Article 7 affirms that civil society is an essential element of a pluralistic and participatory democracy and that it serves as a cornerstone for democratic governance, fostering transparency, accountability and civic engagement. Beyond politics, this provision also recognises that civil society drives economic progress, social cohesion, cultural enrichment and environmental stewardship. Through its active role, this provision underscores that civil society strengthens the foundations of a just and sustainable society, ensuring inclusive and equitable development for all.

Article 9 of the Constitution enshrines national values, among which is human dignity. Human dignity and democracy are intertwined concepts. At its core, human dignity – the inherent worth of every individual – forms the moral foundation of democracy.¹⁰ Democracy, in turn, is the political system best suited to protect and uphold that dignity by ensuring equal rights, participation and respect for all. In a democracy, every person has a voice, and laws are shaped by collective consent rather than imposed by force. This reflects the belief that no individual is inferior or expendable; each has the right to shape their destiny. Conversely, when human dignity is denied, democracy falters; oppression, discrimination and exclusion undermine the very principles of equality and freedom that sustain it. Thus, democracy thrives when it honours human dignity, and human dignity is most secure when democracy is just, inclusive, and accountable. One cannot flourish without the other.

The Constitution contains a Bill of Rights and Duties (Arts 10–40), which has a considerable bearing on democracy and elections. Article 10 of the Constitution affirms that the state acknowledges and shall ensure the protection of fundamental human rights, which are inviolable. These rights impose obligations on all public authorities, requiring them to uphold and respect these human rights principles.

Article 14 declares that the state shall ensure all citizens equal access to information. It further adds that every individual holds the inherent right to freedom of thought, expression, communication and the press, exercising these rights across all forms of media. This provision further states that administrative documents are freely accessible to all and that citizens are entitled to know the information held about them in digital records, archives or databases, including its intended use, and may request corrections or updates as prescribed by law. It continues to state that the law regulates the use of information and communication technologies to protect human dignity, personal and family privacy, and the full enjoyment of fundamental rights.

Article 15 of the Constitution states that all citizens have the right to vote and to run for public office, provided they meet the legal requirements. It further guarantees their participation in the governance of public affairs, whether directly or through

10 Clapham, A. (2006) 'Dignity and Democracy'. In *Human Rights Obligations of Non-State Actors*.

elected officials. Additionally, the state is required to uphold the principle of gender equality by ensuring both women and men have equal opportunities to secure political positions.

Article 21 ensures every individual's fundamental right to freedom of association. This means individuals have the right to organise and join a variety of groups, including political parties, labour unions, corporations, social interest organisations and religious communities, as long as they meet legal conditions. Religious organisations, in particular, have the right to regulate their own internal affairs under this article, as long as they follow principles such as national sovereignty, public order and the preservation of human moral and psychological well-being. However, this right is not absolute. If any association – whether a political party, trade union, company, social organisation or religious community – engages in unlawful activities or disrupts harmony among ethnic or social groups, the Constitution permits its prohibition.

Article 22 guarantees citizens the right to freely assemble. However, any gatherings, demonstrations or parades held in public spaces must first obtain authorisation from the relevant authorities as required by law.

Article 26 stipulates that the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution must be exercised in accordance with legal conditions, while respecting public order and the principles or objectives safeguarded by the Constitution. Additionally, this provision adds that these rights cannot be exercised in a way that violates the rights of others. Consequently, they may be subject to specific formalities, conditions, restrictions or sanctions imposed by law, provided these measures are deemed necessary in a democratic society.

Article 42 outlines the presidential election process. The President is elected through direct universal suffrage for a seven-year term and may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms, even if constitutional changes are made subsequently. Re-election is permitted only once. The election is conducted using a two-round majority uninominal voting system. To win the first round, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes cast. If no candidate meets this standard, a second round is held 14 days after the first round's results are revealed. Only the top two applicants from the first round make it to the second round.

If one of the top two candidates withdraws or becomes ineligible, the next highest-ranked candidate from the first round takes their place. The candidate who receives the most votes in the second round is proclaimed victorious.

Article 43 outlines the eligibility criteria for candidates running for the Gabonese presidency. To qualify, individuals must be Gabonese by birth, with at least one parent also born in Gabon, and must hold exclusive Gabonese nationality. Candidates must be between 35 and 70 years old and married to a Gabonese spouse (also born to at least one Gabonese parent), and must have resided in Gabon continuously for at least three years before the election. Additionally, they must speak at least one national language, be in good physical and mental health (certified by a court-approved medical board) and possess full civil and political rights. Dual nationals may run only if they renounce their foreign citizenship at least three years before the election. The spouse and descendants of a sitting president are barred from succeeding them. If a candidate dies or becomes incapacitated within a month before the first round, the Constitutional Court can postpone the election, extending deadlines as needed, but not beyond the outgoing president's term expiry.

Article 118 states that any voter, candidate, political party or government delegate has the right to challenge the validity of an election before the Constitutional Court. Such challenges must follow the procedural rules established for cases brought before the Constitutional Court.

Legal framework

On 20 January 2025, Gabon's transitional parliament adopted Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January 2025 on the Electoral Code in the Gabonese Republic (hereinafter Electoral Code), a key step in preparing for the upcoming presidential election. The new Code is said to address past electoral irregularities and ensure a fairer voting process. It specifies voter eligibility, candidate requirements, campaign regulations and dispute resolution mechanisms. The Code also governs the conduct of presidential, legislative and local elections and introduces several reforms aimed at modernising the electoral system and enhancing transparency.

Key measures include the implementation of a biometric electoral register to improve voter identification and reduce fraud, as well as the establishment of two new oversight bodies: an Election and Referendum Control Authority (ACER), an independent institution tasked with ensuring electoral integrity, and a National Commission for the Organisation and Co-ordination of Elections and Referendums (CNOCER),¹¹ which co-ordinates efforts across multiple government departments to streamline election administration. To broaden participation, the Code mandates automatic voter registration for all adult citizens holding a national identification number, alongside gender and youth quotas requiring political parties to field at least 30 per cent female candidates and 20 per cent young candidates. Financial regulations have also been tightened, with caps on campaign spending and transparency requirements for political financing.

Additional provisions include parliamentary representation for the Gabonese diaspora, allocating two seats to citizens living abroad, and expanded eligibility for certain public officials – such as magistrates, security force officers and senior accountants – to participate in post-transition elections under specific conditions. Finally, the Code envisages equitable public media access for candidates,¹² with airtime allocation monitored by the HAC under the Constitutional Court's oversight.

In terms of the administration of elections, Articles 12 and 13 of the Code specify that the Ministry of the Interior is in charge of overseeing all aspects of elections and referendums, including their preparation, organisation and administration. This places the Ministry firmly in charge of the planning, co-ordination and management of these democratic procedures. Under the role of lead management officer in terms of elections, the duties of the Minister of Interior include registering voters, creating and maintaining electoral lists, and distributing voter cards. The Minister ensures the electoral register is consistently updated and oversees the procurement and transportation of necessary voting materials. Additionally, the Minister designates polling centres and offices and submits the finalised electoral lists, supplementary tables and polling location details to the Constitutional Court, or to the relevant administrative court for local elections, no later than seven days before voting begins.

11 Article 15 of Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January.

12 Article 98 states that 'During the election campaign period, candidates or lists of candidates shall have equitable access to public audiovisual communication media.'

The Minister also develops and leads civic education initiatives to inform citizens, monitors electoral materials and compiles the list of eligible polling station presidents. Furthermore, the Minister archives all election-related documents and keeps the public informed about the Ministry's office's activities and decisions through press releases and other communication channels.

Article 14 of the Code outlines the responsibilities of the Ministry of the Interior in administering elections. The Ministry is tasked with transmitting the final list of each polling station to local electoral commissions for verification and posting no later than 15 days before the election (or seven days in the case of a referendum). It must ensure the smooth operation of the electoral campaign, liaising with relevant authorities when necessary, and publish the list of polling centres and offices through local commissions.

Additionally, the Ministry appoints polling station members and signs the mandates of candidate representatives via local commissions. It establishes the list of accredited national and international observers, oversees voting operations and organises the collection and transmission of polling station records to centralised result locations. The Ministry also conducts vote-counting through local and consular electoral commissions, centralises results for announcement by the Minister of the Interior and submits copies of relevant documents – including centralised minutes, polling station records and announced results – to the Constitutional Court (for presidential, legislative and referendum elections), the Council of State (for departmental and municipal council elections) and the relevant Administrative Court for electoral disputes.

Further duties include archiving all electoral documents; inspecting electoral materials when necessary; informing and educating voters about the voting process; proposing improvements to the Electoral Code; and preserving electoral lists, related documents and materials after each election for future reference.

Article 15 provides that a CNOCER be established by ministerial decree whenever an election or referendum is held. This is tasked with overseeing and co-ordinating all stages of electoral operations, including the preparation, administration and conduct of voting. Its responsibilities include supervising the work of local and consular electoral commissions; processing candidate nomination files for presidential, legislative, senatorial, municipal and departmental elections; and ensuring the proper management of the electoral process. It also handles the distribution of voting materials, oversees vote-counting through local commissions and organises the collection and transmission of polling station records to central tallying locations. Additionally, it consolidates all electoral documentation and compiles and centralises results for announcement by the Minister of the Interior.

According to Article 16, the Minister of the Interior chairs the CNOCER. The CNOCER consists of an office and representatives from numerous ministries, such as those governing Foreign Affairs, National Defence, Security, Communication, Justice, Relations with Constitutional Institutions, Public Accounts and National Education.

Article 30 establishes the creation of an independent administrative body, the election and referendum control authority (ACER). This non-permanent authority operates with administrative and financial autonomy and is activated at least one month before an election, remaining in place until three months after the election concludes. The necessary funding for the ACER's operations is allocated from the general state budget. Additionally, the specific structure and functioning of the ACER are detailed in a separate decree. In carrying out their duties, the members of the

ACER operate independently and are not subject to directives or influence from any public or private entity. This ensures their impartiality and autonomy in decision-making.¹³

ACER is mandated to carry out several key responsibilities, including:¹⁴

- overseeing the proper establishment of local electoral commissions and ensuring their effectiveness;
- guaranteeing voter lists are delivered to all polling stations within the legally required timeframe;
- ensuring the public release of polling centre and office locations;
- notifying candidates of the finalised lists of polling centres, offices and competing candidates in their respective electoral districts;
- monitoring the setup of voting materials and equipment, ensuring everything is in place at polling centres by the day before elections;
- supervising the proper collection and transfer of voting records from polling stations to vote-counting and result consolidation centres;
- maintaining archived copies of all electoral documents for recordkeeping;
- verifying the accuracy and legitimacy of election results;
- proposing reforms and improvements to the Electoral Code to enhance the electoral process.

After every election or referendum, the ACER submits a detailed report on how it carried out its responsibilities. This report is sent to several high-ranking officials and institutions, including the President of the Republic, the leaders of both Houses of Parliament, the Constitutional Court, the Council of State, the Court of Auditors, the Administrative Courts and the Minister of the Interior. The purpose of this report is stated to be the provision of transparency and accountability regarding the electoral process, ensuring all relevant authorities are informed about the conduct and outcomes of the elections or referendums.¹⁵

Various other domestic laws may influence the conduct of elections. These include the Penal Code¹⁶ which deals with, in the context of elections, criminalising electoral offences to ensure a free, fair and orderly electoral process.

Decree No. 000203/PR/MCEN, issued on 6 August 2018, established regulations to ensure fair and equal access for candidates, political parties and political party coalitions to public service media during electoral campaigns.

Regional and international treaties

International and regional conventions play a crucial role in safeguarding the integrity and fairness of elections worldwide by establishing fundamental principles that democratic processes must uphold.

These conventions ensure universal suffrage, guaranteeing that no individual is discriminated against in voting rights based on race, gender, disability or other unjust grounds. This foundational principle promotes inclusivity, allowing all eligible citizens

13 Article 33 of Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January.

14 Article 36 of Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January.

15 Article 37 of Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January.

16 Penal Code (Law no. 21/1963 of 31 May).

to participate in shaping their government. Additionally, they protect the right to free political participation, enabling individuals to form political parties, express their views and campaign without undue restrictions, fostering a vibrant and competitive political environment.

To maintain trust in electoral outcomes, these conventions also mandate fair electoral processes, including transparent vote-counting and establishing independent electoral bodies free from government interference. Such measures help prevent manipulation and ensure results reflect the genuine will of the people. Furthermore, protections against electoral fraud and intimidation are reinforced through international monitoring mechanisms, such as those conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which holds states accountable for upholding democratic standards.

By setting these norms, international conventions strengthen democratic governance, reduce electoral violence and enhance public confidence in political systems. They serve as a framework for nations to conduct elections that are not only free and fair but also widely recognised as legitimate by the international community. Without such safeguards, elections could become tools for authoritarian consolidation rather than genuine expressions of popular sovereignty. Thus, these conventions are indispensable in promoting and protecting democracy globally.

Gabon is a member of the African Union, whose Constitutive Act emphasises the significance of good governance, popular participation and the rule of law and human rights.¹⁷ Gabon has also deposited its signature to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which commits states to the principles necessary for democratic elections.¹⁸

It is significant to note that international standards on elections are fundamentally anchored in three core rights, as articulated in various human rights instruments and democratic frameworks: the right to take part in government, the right to vote and to be elected and the right to equal access to public service.¹⁹ and fairness of electoral processes, forming the bedrock of participatory governance.

The **right to take part in government** is enshrined in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These right guarantees citizens the opportunity to engage in public affairs, either directly or through freely chosen representatives, without undue restrictions. It underscores the principle that legitimate governance derives from the will of the people, necessitating transparent and accountable institutions.

The **right to vote and to be elected** further operationalises democratic participation by ensuring universal and equal suffrage. This entails that elections be conducted freely, without coercion, and that all eligible individuals have the opportunity to cast their ballots in a secret manner to prevent intimidation. Moreover, the right to stand for election must be accessible on non-discriminatory grounds, allowing diverse

17 Adopted 11 July 2000, entered into force 26 May 2001. Articles 3–4 set out objectives like continental unity and democratic governance, and principles including sovereign equality and peaceful dispute resolution.

18 Gabon deposited its signature 2 February 2010. The Charter was adopted 30 January 2007, and entered into force 15 February 2012: AU Doc A/CHG/235(XXXVIII).

19 United Nations (1994) *Handbook on the Legal, Technical and Human Rights Aspects of Elections*. Para.19

representation in public office. Any disenfranchisement – whether based on race, gender, ethnicity or other protected characteristics – constitutes a violation of international norms.

The **right to equal access to public service** mandates that all citizens, without prejudice, may serve in governmental functions under fair and merit-based conditions. This principle, also articulated in Article 25(c) of the ICCPR, reinforces that public offices must be open to all segments of society, preventing exclusionary practices that undermine equitable governance.

A Constitution, as the supreme legal framework of a nation, establishes the structure of government, fundamental rights and the limits of state power. When a country enters into a treaty, it assumes international obligations that must align with its constitutional provisions. In many states, treaties require legislative approval or constitutional ratification to ensure domestic enforceability and compliance with constitutional principles. Some constitutions prioritise treaties over ordinary laws, while others uphold constitutional supremacy, mandating that treaties conform to domestic law. In Gabon, Article 166 of the Constitution explicitly affirms the supremacy of duly ratified and published international treaties over domestic laws, provided they are reciprocally implemented by other parties, thereby balancing international commitments with constitutional adherence. This framework ensures treaty obligations harmonise with national legal standards while upholding the principle of reciprocity.

Gabon is bound by the United Nations conventions on political rights and civil liberties. The United Nations has established several key conventions and declarations that promote political rights and civil liberties, significantly impacting electoral processes worldwide. These instruments aim to ensure elections are free, fair and inclusive, upholding democratic principles. They include the following:

- **UDHR 1948:** Article 21 establishes the right to participate in government, whether directly or through freely elected representatives, and this is guaranteed for all individuals. To ensure this, elections must be authentic, held at regular intervals and based on universal and equal suffrage. Additionally, voting should be carried out by secret ballot or through other equivalent methods that safeguard the freedom of the voting process.
- **ICCPR 1966:**²⁰ Article 25 ensures citizens the right to vote and stand for election in fair, regularly held polls. It guarantees equal access to public services, prohibiting discrimination or unjust advantages based on background, identity or status. All citizens must have the same opportunities to benefit from government programmes and participate in public affairs – whether through voting, governance or policy discussions – without exclusion on the grounds of race, gender, religion, disability or other irrelevant factors. This principle strengthens democracy by fostering inclusivity and equal representation in shaping societal decisions. Article 19 protects freedom of expression, crucial for open electoral debates. Articles 21 and 22 ensure freedom of assembly and association, allowing parties and civil society to operate freely.
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) 1965):**²¹ CERD prohibits racial discrimination in political participation, ensuring equal voting rights for all ethnic and racial groups.

20 Gabon acceded to the ICCPR on 21 January 1983.

21 Ratified by Gabon on 29 February 1980.

- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979:**²² CEDAW ensures women's rights to vote, stand for elections and participate in policy-making. CEDAW also addresses barriers like gender-based violence in elections.
- **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006:**²³ Article 29 of the CRPD guarantees that PWDs can vote independently and secretly, with accessible polling stations.

Together, these rights establish a framework for free, fair and transparent elections, ensuring political participation is broad-based, representative and reflective of the populace's will. Compliance with these standards is essential for upholding democratic legitimacy and safeguarding fundamental human rights in electoral systems worldwide.

Election administration: the application of election law in Gabon

The voters' list

A voters' list is an important measure in an election. It ensures that citizens who qualify to vote in an election and have made the effort to register as voters are, in fact, listed as voters. The list must be correct concerning the placement of voters in their

²² Ratified by Gabon on 21 January 1983.

²³ Ratified by Gabon on 1 October 2007.



Commonwealth Observer Group member, Mosotho Moepya, at the interim statement press conference

correct polling stations. This is necessary to ensure the right to vote is given effect on the one hand and protected on the other in compliance with the dictates of the right to vote, as enshrined in the Constitution.²⁴

Common electoral practice enables voters who are deceased or who wish to de-register from the voters' list as voters to be removed from the active segment of the voters' list or be de-registered in time to maintain the accuracy and reliability of the voters' list. A voters' list that is maintained and up to date is instrumental in the prevention of electoral fraud and disputes that usually arise in elections.

The Group observed that the voters' list used in the 2025 presidential election contained some names of deceased voters. In some of the observed instances, the Group established that the inclusion of the deceased upset family members. Notwithstanding, the Group could not verify the claims in each case. As such, there is a need to attend to this voters' list challenge as soon as possible to avoid future recurrence.

Recommendations

- The Minister of Interior immediately consider affording citizens the opportunity of new voters enlisting their names on the voters' list, currently enlisted voters updating their details where their details have changed since their last enlisting or deceased voters and those wishing to de-register from the list to be provided the opportunity to do so.
- The Minister of Interior consider establishing a timetable to enlist or amend details on the voters' list for all citizens to know the cut-off date for this initiative so that all impacted by it may know the relevant dates and comply.
- A period be included during which the updated list is available for inspection by the public and for corrections to be incorporated before the list is finalised for an election.
- That authorities embark on a publicity campaign to inform and educate the citizens on the need for this initiative and the importance of the dates involved.

Qualification to contest the 2025 presidential election

Qualification to stand for elected office and hold such an office, if elected, is key to a credible election. It ensures that only eligible persons are admitted as candidates and balances frivolity against a potential denial of the right of a citizen to stand as a candidate in an election and be voted to hold elected office.

The Group noted that the criteria to qualify as a candidate in the 2025 presidential election were revised extensively given the unique circumstances of Gabon following the November 2024 referendum. These provisions are contained in the Electoral Code passed into law in January 2025 (Articles 170-171).

The Group believes that, in the context of Gabon, these criteria may have sought to capture a 'never again' resolve by the citizenry. In this context, certain provisions will likely remain impractical for any institution tasked with ensuring only qualified

24 Article 15 of the Constitution states thus: 'Every Gabonese citizen is entitled to vote and to stand for election under the conditions set by law. They must be able to participate in the management of public affairs, either directly or through elected representatives. The State guarantees equal access for women and men to electoral mandates, as well as to political and professional responsibilities.'

individuals are admitted as candidates. This is particularly important given that all disqualifications must be objectively arrived at and supported by credible evidence that is available to candidates and citizens.

The criteria enacted in Article 170 of the Electoral Code include the following:

- be born in Gabon to at least one Gabonese parent who was himself born in Gabon;
- have sole and exclusive Gabonese nationality;
- be aged between 35 and 70;
- be married to a Gabonese national born of at least one Gabonese parent who was himself or herself born in Gabon;
- have resided in Gabon for at least three continuous years prior to the presidential election;
- speak at least one national language;
- be in a state of complete physical and mental well-being, duly certified by a medical board sworn in by the Constitutional Court. This medical board is appointed by the Bureaux of the two Houses of Parliament;
- enjoy civil and political rights.

Additionally, any Gabonese holding another nationality may stand as a candidate, provided they have renounced it three years prior to the election. At the end of the President's term of office, his spouse and descendants may not stand as candidates to succeed him.

The Group recommends that the Minister of Interior place these challenges as a priority to be addressed in the medium term. It is the considered view of the Group that, while these criteria remained unchallenged in the 2025 presidential election, there are indications that they are a source of dissatisfaction for some citizens and will unlikely survive future challenges beyond the transition.

Access to the Constitutional Court in presidential elections

The Constitutional Court in Gabon is the court empowered by the Constitution to resolve, hear and decide electoral cases in a presidential election (Articles 44 and 113). It is also a court of final instance in these matters.

In its meeting with the President of the Constitutional Court and its Justices, the Group learnt of the steps taken by the Court to prepare for the orderly conduct of this election. Among other things, the Court indicated that there were no cases pending its decision(s), that it had determined that court fees be waived to ensure access to justice by candidates and that it would also have a representative in some key activities to ensure matters implicated in its authority were dealt with. The Group commends the Court for taking these measures, which are necessary.

Recommendations

Given the precedent set in this election, which will impact the next generation of elections that are likely to follow shortly (i.e., for the National Assembly and local government), it is recommended that:

- measures taken by the Court in the period leading up to the conduct of the 2025 presidential election be legislated in the Electoral Code to avoid discretion being applied loosely by different justices in that Court in the future;
- an equivalent determination be considered for all the lower courts mandated to deal with election-related cases.

Importance of compliance with electoral laws

Compliance with electoral laws is fundamental to upholding the integrity of a country's democratic processes. When electoral laws are strictly followed, they ensure elections are conducted fairly, transparently and without undue influence, reinforcing public confidence in the political system. A credible electoral process fosters stability by minimising disputes, reducing the risk of violence and ensuring the will of the people is accurately reflected in the outcome.

Moreover, adherence to these laws helps prevent fraud, manipulation and other malpractices that could undermine the legitimacy of elected leaders. When citizens trust that their votes count and that the electoral system is just, they are more likely to participate actively in democracy, strengthening civic engagement and national unity. Conversely, violations of electoral laws can lead to mistrust, political unrest and even prolonged crises, as seen in nations where results have been contested.

In Gabon specifically, where democratic institutions continue to evolve, strict compliance with electoral regulations is essential to consolidating good governance, ensuring peaceful transitions of power and reinforcing the country's commitment to the rule of law. By prioritising legal and ethical standards in elections, Gabon can build a more inclusive and resilient democracy that earns both domestic and international respect.



Representative of the Ministry of Interior (in charge of managing the elections) briefing the COG

Challenges identified in Gabon's legal and institutional framework governing elections

The Gabonese election legal framework faces several challenges that could impact the credibility and fairness of the election. A number of areas for potential electoral reform could be considered, which are covered in this Chapter, but also more extensively in subsequent chapters.

Timeline for Reforms

The enactment of the Electoral Code in close proximity to election day significantly limited the time available for effective implementation, stakeholder consultation and public education. This compressed timeline risks undermining the credibility of the electoral process, as voters and electoral officials alike may lack sufficient understanding of new provisions.

Recommendation

- future electoral reforms should be introduced well in advance, preferably at least six months before elections, to allow for comprehensive dissemination, training and public awareness campaigns.

Electoral management body structures

The management structure overseeing the elections lacks the requisite independence,²⁵ both in practice and perception, raising concerns about impartiality. Elections in Gabon are overseen by the Minister of Interior, an appointee of the transitional president, who was a candidate in the elections, and in a country where democracy is in the process of maturing.

EMBs are essential for managing and administering electoral processes. However, they can vary significantly in structure, function and governance.

Worldwide, different types of EMBs serve essential functions in the electoral process, each type with unique advantages. The choice of structure can significantly influence the integrity, efficiency and public perception of electoral processes. Their functioning may be suitable depending on the context of the jurisdiction in which they are established.

Different models for election management

1. **Independent electoral commissions** are established by law and operate independently from the government (e.g., India, Australia, South Africa, etc.). Its members are often appointed based on merit and are protected from political influence. Thus, they enjoy political neutrality and often employ professionals who develop election expertise and a career in election management. This model is generally suited to countries transitioning from conflict to democracy.
2. **Government ministries** are found in countries where electoral management is conducted by a ministry or department within the government (e.g., France, Sweden, etc.). Their key advantage is their direct access to state resources and infrastructure, which can facilitate the electoral process.²⁶ They are best suited to environments where election management and trust in democracy are mature.

²⁵ See African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), Art. 17.

²⁶ Norris, P. (2012) *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. CUP.

3. **More than one body involved in the organisation of elections.** In this category, there is often one body organising elections and another supervising it. These models are often used in environments where the state machinery is preferred for the organisation of elections but a supervisory body is established to ensure the organising body carries out its mandate lawfully (e.g., in Mexico, the National Electoral Institute oversees the administration of federal elections with its activities supervised by the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary; in Brazil, the Superior Electoral Court is responsible for administering elections and acts as the EMB but is overseen by the Federal Supreme Court, which resolves electoral disputes and oversees legality). Alternatively, the model is slightly varied, with a division of responsibilities and localised administration of elections (e.g., the United States, Germany, etc.). This can enhance electoral integrity and efficiency, albeit sometimes leading to complexities in co-ordination.
4. **Hybrid models** incorporate both independent and governmental elements (e.g., Canada); they may have appointed members and government representatives working together. It is argued that this model combines the accountability of government oversight with the independence necessary to conduct free and fair elections.²⁷
5. **Judicial or quasi-judicial bodies.** In these EMBs, an organising EMB may comprise certain interest groupings, with oversight falling under the jurisdiction of a judicial or quasi-judicial body. They resolve electoral disputes and ensure compliance with electoral laws.
6. **Decentralised electoral authorities** are found in federal systems or large nations where electoral responsibilities may be decentralised and managed at regional or local levels (e.g., Australia's state electoral commissions). Proponents of this model argue that it is particularly useful for applying tailored approaches to electoral management that respect regional needs and contexts.²⁸

The Group notes the complexity of the transition in Gabon but wishes to propose consideration for a number of measures outlined below.

Recommendations

- to consider simplifying its EMB structure beyond the transition;
- to consider the necessary measures to enhance the functional independence of its electoral management structures, which will ultimately be the sovereign decision of the Gabonese people.

The role of the ACER

Establishing an ACER for this transitional election in Gabon must be lauded. The Electoral Code mandates the ACER to monitor the electoral process and intervene where aberrations occur (Article 30). The ACER's monitoring role is especially crucial for ensuring action taken by election officers in polling stations complies with the electoral legislative framework.

The Group observed the presence of ACER representatives in every polling station, and we outline our observations on their role in Chapter 6.

²⁷ Reilly, B. (2006) *Democratization and Electoral Reform in the Asia-Pacific Region*. Routledge.

²⁸ Dahl, R. (2016) *On Democracy*. 2nd edition. Yale University Press.

The Group noted that the appointment of ACER members was for a limited duration, prescribed by the Electoral Code as starting at least one month before the election and ending three months after the election (Article 30). This is less than ideal, in the Group's view. This is so because those working at the ACER must have a thorough comprehension of the law so as to be able to meaningfully and effectively exercise their monitoring mandate. By implication, they must be well trained and equipped.

Following the Group's observation, ACER members would benefit immensely from training in the Electoral Code and should possibly be present when presidents and other polling station officers are trained. Training might even include an assessment element with a minimum grade that must be attained for the trainee to be eligible to serve as a member of the ACER in a polling station.

The Group accepts that realising its recommendation implies that the provisions of the Electoral Code may have to be amended (particularly considering lengthening the appointment period before an election and, if necessary, reducing the length of the period after the election). The Group considers this necessary in the circumstances, given the complexity that will be introduced by the local and legislative elections.

Recommendation

- Should more elections be contemplated imminently, ACER staff's appointment period should be extended and retained, and also thoroughly trained in that period to be ready to execute their mandate more effectively.

Voter list and data management

The current practice of publicly availing the voter list without adequate safeguards exposes sensitive personal data, creating significant privacy risks. Names, identification details and other personally identifiable information are accessible to anyone, which may potentially leave voters vulnerable to misuse, identity theft or even targeted harassment. The failure to adequately protect voter data by publicly disclosing sensitive personal information without proper safeguards may undermine both individual privacy and public trust in the electoral process. Exposing details such as names and identification numbers also disregards core data protection principles like confidentiality and lawful processing. Addressing these privacy risks is essential to uphold electoral integrity and ensure compliance with fundamental rights.

This lack of adherence to key data protection principles – including confidentiality, integrity and lawful processing – risks eroding confidence in the electoral process and may infringe upon essential privacy rights.²⁹

To address these concerns, the extension of the existing application of biometric registration and identification for voter management could be considered, as this would substantially improve security and reduce unnecessary data exposure. Unlike traditional ID-based systems, biometric identifiers are inherently unique to each person and far more difficult to forge or misuse. Implementing biometric authentication would offer several advantages:

29 Article 18 of the Constitution of Gabon (Privacy Clause) states that 'every individual is entitled to the protection of their private life. The home is a sacred space that cannot be violated, and any search of a residence must be authorized by a judge or other legally designated authorities, conducted strictly in accordance with established legal procedures. Exceptions to this principle—allowing for intrusions or limitations on the home's inviolability—are permitted only in cases of urgent public necessity, such as preventing widespread dangers, maintaining public order in the face of imminent threats, addressing epidemic risks, or safeguarding individuals at risk. Any such restrictions must be based on legal provisions and justified by overriding concerns of public safety or national security.'

- It would minimise data exposure by replacing the storage and public display of personal details like names and addresses with encrypted biometric templates – mathematical representations of physical traits that are meaningless if intercepted.
- Biometrics enhance accuracy and security by virtually eliminating duplicate or fraudulent voter registrations, ensuring only eligible individuals can participate.
- Access control would be strengthened. Unlike open voter rolls, biometric verification would restrict sensitive data access to authorised electoral officials, allowing voter authentication without publicly revealing personal information.

Additionally, a well-designed biometric system would comply with data protection laws by incorporating encryption, strict access controls and audit trails, adhering to principles of data minimisation and purpose limitation.

Recommendation

- Consider extending the existing application of biometric registration and identification for voter management to include the implementation of biometric authentication.

Campaign period and funding expenditure limits

The Group was also concerned that the limited transition timeline and shortened campaign period in Gabon's presidential election may have disadvantaged some candidates, by limiting their ability to mobilise support, communicate their platform and reach voters nationwide.

To address the challenges posed by the abbreviated campaign period in Gabon's presidential elections, it is recommended that electoral reforms be implemented to ensure a more equitable and transparent electoral process. Given Gabon's logistical constraints, including limited infrastructure and media access in remote areas, a longer timeframe would help mitigate the disproportionate advantages often enjoyed by incumbents or well-resourced political entities.

Election campaign funding in Gabon is governed by strict regulations outlined in the Electoral Code (Articles 102–111), which establishes clear limits on the amount of funding that each presidential candidate is permitted to receive and utilise. For the 2025 presidential election, this amount was set at CFA 10 billion (Article 108). As of 14 April 2025, the exchange rate between the CFA franc and the US dollar was 1:0.0017. Converted, this amounts to 17,303,510.80.

The Group notes that, considering the short notice given for this election, the expenditure limit for the campaign was significantly high.

Meanwhile, in the view of the Group, expenditure on the campaign remains opaque: none of the candidates appeared to have filed a return indicating the amount of expenditure incurred in the election.

These aspects are also explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

Media

Additionally, measures should be taken to guarantee fair media coverage and equitable access to campaign resources, ensuring all candidates can compete on a level playing field. These reforms would uphold the principles of democratic fairness and enhance the credibility of future elections. These aspects are also covered in Chapter 5.

Additional challenges

A number of other challenges that had a direct impact on the conduct of Election Day itself, and the management of the results and disputes in the post-election period, are outlined separately in more detail in Chapter 6. They pertain to:

- The involvement of security personnel in the polling process and their heavy deployment around polling stations, which further undermines trust in the electoral system;
- An insufficient dispute resolution period as mandated by the Constitutional Court;
- Inconsistency in the application of provisions in the Electoral Code relating to the manner in which citizen and international observers could witness the counting process after the close of polls;
- The existence of early official projections of the election results before final verification, in place of voter turnout and participation rates, which could also undermine trust in the electoral system;
- Lack of proper identification of polling staff and lack of understanding among voters of procedures, which raised concerns about accreditation and training of polling staff;
- The current ballot paper, which is bifurcated into dual compartments, and introduces unnecessary complexity into the electoral process. In addition, the practice of polling officials physically signing ballot papers, though intended to authenticate votes, which proves inefficient and inadequate for ensuring electoral integrity;
- A number of procedural deficiencies observed in the tabulation, collation and dissemination of electoral results.

Given Gabon's transition, the Group recognises the importance of institutional and capacity-building reforms. These reforms will need to be systematic, with some achievable in the short term and others requiring a long-term approach.

Noting that further elections may be imminent, the Group recommends consideration for a number of measures to be prioritised, including revisions to the length of appointment of ACER members and campaign expenditure limits (see Chapter 5 for detail).

Gabon has the opportunity to enhance the credibility and transparency of its electoral processes by adopting measures tailored to its unique context. Strengthening the integrity of voting is essential to fostering public trust and ensuring fair representation. By carefully selecting and adapting international good practice, Gabon can build an electoral framework that reflects both global standards and local realities.

A balanced approach, considering Gabon's specific needs, would ensure reforms are practical, sustainable and widely accepted. Ultimately, a more verifiable, secure and transparent electoral system would contribute to political stability and strengthen democratic governance in Gabon.

To ensure a smooth and effective transition, it is advisable to implement pilot programmes in targeted jurisdictions to assess the performance and reliability of new verification technologies prior to scaling nationwide. Concurrently, comprehensive public awareness initiatives should be introduced to familiarise voters with updated verification processes, fostering both seamless integration and confidence in the modernised electoral system. This phased approach balances thorough evaluation with proactive voter education, promoting transparency and trust throughout the reform process.

4. Participation and Inclusion

Introduction

Leadership and participation in the public and political arena for all citizens in all their diversities is a human right and vital for shaping policy outcomes in the economic, social and cultural spheres of any country. This chapter examines the representation and participation of specific groups of Gabonese citizens in the 2025 presidential election, including youth, women, PWDs and civil society at both institutional and operational levels.

Gabon is party to eight of the nine core international human rights treaties, as well as several regional human rights instruments. Additionally, the national legislative and policy framework upholds all citizens' rights to full participation in public spheres, including elections, without discrimination. The following laws and policies are of particular relevance:

- Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January 2025 relating to the Electoral Code;
- Law no. 001/2017 relating to public meetings and demonstrations;
- Law no. 009/2016 of 5 September 2016 establishing quotas for access by women and young people to political elections and that of women to senior government positions;



Representative of a women's rights group briefing the COG

- Law no. 019/2016 of 9 August 2016 relating to the Communication Code;
- Law no. 019/1995 of 13 February 1996 relating to the organisation of social protection for persons with disabilities;
- Gabon Decade of Women 2015–2025.

We commend the Gabonese government's commitment to ensuring the enjoyment of human rights for all, including the right to participate in public and political life as enshrined in Article 15 of the Gabonese Constitution, which provides for 'equal access for women and men to electoral mandates as well as to political and professional responsibilities.'

Women's participation

The institutional progress made in Gabon to promote gender equality is commendable and reflects the existing and new legislation put in place over the past eight years. Generally, some progress has been made on Gabonese women's rights in terms of political participation and leadership representation. For instance, to increase the direct and active participation of women in political life, Law no. 009/2016 established a candidacy quota of 30 per cent for women. The Electoral Code similarly provides for a candidacy quota of 30 per cent for women. However, the country records an underrepresentation of women in Parliament. As of February 2024, women held 25.5 per cent of seats in the Transitional National Assembly and only 20.3 per cent of seats in the Transitional Senate.³⁰

There were concerted efforts to ensure women's participation throughout the transition. In April 2024, women were part of the DNI, which brought together various stakeholders to discuss the issues facing the country in the political, economic and social spheres and to seek consensus on solutions.

Gabonese women participated in the electoral process at different levels, as candidates, campaigners and voters. However, only one of the eight presidential candidates contesting the election, Zenaba Gninga Chaning, was a woman.

Women participated in campaigns organised by the candidates in various locations throughout the country. We were informed that the general population was insufficiently informed on the provisions of the Constitution, the Electoral Code and electoral processes. We were also informed that women's organisations played a critical role in the mobilisation and sensitisation of women during the electoral campaign to increase their participation. One example of an initiative to ensure women's right to participate in political life and the 2025 presidential election was the Network of Human Rights Defenders, which implemented an initiative to monitor violence against women on social media during the campaign. Women's representatives highlighted that the compressed electoral timeline posed a challenge to greater participation by women in the 2025 presidential election and their ability to support each other. Stakeholders believed they could have done more to address the financial constraints facing women, as they did in the 2023 election, through saving groups (*tontines*), had there been more time between the announcement and election day.

30 IPU Global Data on National Parliaments: Gabon.

Gabonese women exercised their rights as voters through self-registration on the electoral register and casting their ballots on election day. We lacked access to registration and turnout data disaggregated by gender, so we are unable to confirm that our observations of active participation by women voters are consistent with actual participation rates.

Across the locations where our Group was deployed, we observed women in all their diversity actively engaged in the election, from the opening of polling stations until their closing, as well as during the counting process.

We observed that queues at polling centres were orderly, and we commend the priority accorded to pregnant women as well as older people and PWDs where it was provided, in line with the recommendation posted at polling stations.

Groups of young and adult women were seen at polling centres, tirelessly waiting for the counting process. During the counting process, some groups were seen peacefully dancing while waiting to celebrate the results of their efforts to vote.

There appeared to be a gender balance among polling staff and ACER monitors across the polling stations. Representation of male and female youth and adults among the polling station staff was also observed, though there are no intentional provisions in this regard in the electoral law. There were some isolated cases of no women being represented among the polling staff. However, most of the observed polling station staff included at least one female out of five polling station staff. However, low representation of women as polling station presidents was noticed, although in a number of stations most ACER monitors were female. We are unable to confirm that our observations on the gender composition of polling staff are consistent with actual composition owing to the unavailability of disaggregated data on polling staff.

Barriers identified to the effective participation and representation of Gabonese women in elections include persisting negative cultural and gender norms; lack of resources to fulfil quota requirements and finance campaigns; limited access to public infrastructure (roads, schools, electricity, technology); low awareness on the rights of women; and limited opportunities for women's movement financing, solidarity and capacity-building to effectively address the issue of gender-based violence.

Despite the existence of a legislatively mandated candidate quota of 30 per cent for women,³¹ there appeared to be a general lack of clear and consistent strategies and pathways to address noted gender inclusivity challenges, and therefore women's representation in elected positions remains low. For instance, according pregnant and older women priority voting is not a legally binding requirement but rather a recommendation. The noted absence of disaggregated data on the inclusion of women in all their diversity (rural and urban, young and older, etc.) makes it difficult to plan for key interventions in the electoral process.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the women's movement: Gabonese authorities may wish to consider financially supporting women's rights organisations to educate women on the Constitution, the Electoral Code and their rights to political participation, as well as to provide mentorship for women candidates in the legislative and local elections.

31 Article 83, Organic Law no. 001/2025 of 19 January on the Electoral Code and Law no. 009/2016 of 5 September establishing quotas for access by women and young people to political elections and of women to senior political positions.



COG member, Gaudence Mushimiyimana (Rwanda), at a briefing

- Increase women's participation in upcoming electoral processes: First, adopt measures to ensure the 30 per cent candidacy quota is achieved. Second, train more women as polling staff with a view to ensuring a greater percentage of polling station presidents are women.
- Ensure gender-sensitive elections: The government should consult with women's rights organisations to consistently identify meaningful gender-sensitive affirmative actions, such as priority voting for pregnant and older women, to be considered for inclusion as binding provisions in the Electoral Code.
- Collect and disaggregate data on voter registration, turnout and polling staff by gender, age and disability.

Participation of persons with disabilities

In the 2013 Census, PWDs comprise 2.2 per cent of Gabon's population.³² This is well below the global figure of 16 per cent,³³ suggesting the actual figure in Gabon may be higher.

While Gabon has ratified the United Nations CRPD, it does not have comprehensive legislation specifically addressing PWDs. The sole piece of legislation relating to disability is from 1995 and only provides for social protection benefits. The Gabonese legal framework does not contain an explicit prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of disability and there is no provision on the right of PWDs to representation and participation in political life on an equal basis with others.

We were informed that limited opportunities existed for PWDs in Gabon. Disabled persons' organisations (DPOs) are generally gender- and disability-specific. The National Federation of Associations for Disabled Persons in Gabon represents these organisations. We were informed that most PWDs struggled to access basic education and employment owing to discrimination, which in turn limits access to the

³² As reported in Gabon's first periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GAB/1.

³³ WHO (2023) 'Disability'. Factsheet.

political sphere. Prior to the presidential election, DPOs were part of the DNI, working through their representatives. DPOs also mobilised their members to participate in the referendum. These DPOs were concerned that PWDs had insufficient or no information on the Constitution and Electoral Code and were not informed about the electoral process for various reasons.

Accessibility for PWDs evolves over time and based on context. PWDs are the best experts on matters relating to disability and the reasonable accommodations needed to increase their participation in society on an equal basis with others, including during an election, in accordance with Article 4 of the CRPD and the disability slogan 'Nothing about us without us.'

In a context of a very limited funding for the rights of PWDs and their representative organisations, it was very challenging to reach out to PWDs for sensitisation in the run-up to the election. There were no specific interventions by the government or other stakeholders to reach out to PWDs. Information on the electoral process and candidates' campaigns on radio, television and posters was not accessible to all PWDs in all their diversity. Sign language was not consistently provided and PWDs reported not having access to radio and television for accurate information. DPOs were prepared to provide the support required, including the production of braille documents and reaching out to PWDs to ensure accessible information throughout the election process, but they were not engaged. We did not witness the representation of PWDs in electoral management structures.

Despite the identified challenges, PWDs were seen attending candidates' campaigns, acting as citizen observers and exercising their right to vote on 12 April 2025. We noted that voters with disabilities were generally accorded priority. Physical barriers to some polling stations, such as inaccessible or muddy roads, hindered voting. Polling stations located on the second floor of school buildings without ramps contravened the legal requirement that 'all construction of buildings or public roads must meet the standards of accessibility and movement for people with disabilities. Existing buildings and roads must be subject to appropriate development.'³⁴

Recommendations

- Adopt a comprehensive stand-alone law protecting the rights of PWDs.
- Consider completing ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa.³⁵
- Establish permanent mechanisms at the national and local levels for participation and consultation with DPOs in relation to law- and policy-making and ensure the function of the National Committee for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities.
- Provide DPOs with sufficient continuous financial resources to ensure they can provide policy-makers with information on the needs and views of PWDs so they may be meaningfully taken into account in future planning processes.
- Ensure the inclusion and participation of PWDs in the electoral process: Gabonese authorities should consider amending the Electoral Code to include candidacy quota for PWDs as it currently does for youth and women. Additionally, Gabonese authorities should consider setting a quota system for PWDs as staff in all electoral structures (electoral commission, ACER)

³⁴ Article 13, Law no. 019/1995 relating to the organisation of social protection for persons with disabilities in Gabon.

³⁵ Gabon deposited its signature to the Protocol on 5 July 2019.

and decision-making processes, and ensure priority is accorded to voters with disabilities through a legally binding provision. Training of polling staff is recommended to raise awareness of PWDs and address specific needs and persisting discriminatory practices and attitudes. Alternative methods of voting could be provided to PWDs, such as mobile voting, online voting or allowing PWDs to vote from their place of residence.

- Consider putting in place frameworks and tools to regularly monitor the accessibility of elections. For example, through consultation and active involvement of DPOs, an election accessibility checklist tool should be developed and regularly implemented prior to all elections.
- Consider the collection of voter data disaggregated by age, gender and disability.
- To the extent possible, reproduce laws (e.g. Constitution, Electoral Code), electoral guidelines and voting materials in accessible and easy-to-read formats (e.g. large print, braille) and ensure sign language is provided.

Youth participation

Gabon's population is youthful, with about half the population under the age of 20 and the median age being 21.³⁶ As Gabon transitions towards a sustained democracy, integrating young people in the process is critical.

The Constitution of Gabon, which provides the legal framework for youth participation in elections, sets the voting age at 18 years. As noted in Chapter 3, the legislative framework provides for a 20 per cent candidate quota for young people. However, the definition of young person in Gabonese legislation is any person between the ages of 18 and 40,³⁷ as opposed to 35 years and below as set out in the African Union Youth Charter. This inconsistency should be addressed.

We observed that young people were limited in their involvement both in the pre-election processes and on election day. Youth engagement lacked structure and intentionality. Key electoral stakeholders, including the Ministry of Interior, candidates and CSOs, did not implement deliberate strategies to involve young people meaningfully in the electoral process.

The National Youth Council, which could have been pivotal in mobilising and educating youth, appeared significantly under-resourced. As a result, it could not carry out impactful engagement sessions or outreach activities across the country. We observed that, despite these limitations, it implemented project Zéro Casse, Zéro Distraction to prevent violence, disinformation and acts of vandalism most often perpetrated by young people during the election period.³⁸ However, the general absence of co-ordinated youth engagement initiatives by stakeholders in the electoral process contributed to a broader disconnect between young people and the electoral process.

36 World Bank (2025) Gabon Overview.

37 Article 3, Law no. 009/2016.

38 Conseil National de la Jeunesse de Gabon (2025) Facebook, 2 April.



Joshua Opey (Ghana), Chairperson of the Commonwealth Youth Council and a member of the COG, at a briefing.

Recommendations

- The National Youth Council could be given the requisite support by the government and development partners to enable them to play their rightful role in engaging young people in the electoral process.
- Election organising institutions and stakeholders should have specific arrangements to engage with youth groups at every phase of the electoral process.
- Candidates for elections should engage young people among the stakeholders consulted in developing their campaign policies.

We also observed that voter education targeting young people was insufficient. Most awareness campaigns before the election were conducted online, mainly through official institutional social media pages. However, many young people in Gabon do not actively follow these platforms, creating a communication gap. This reliance on social media and online messaging failed to reach large segments of the youth population, particularly those in more remote or underserved areas. Furthermore, there was minimal effort to use offline or grassroots-level engagements to ensure young people received comprehensive information about the voting process.

Recommendation

- Election-organising institutions and other stakeholders should work with youth bodies like the National Youth Council and student unions to implement election awareness-raising campaigns that target young people and reach every young person.

Another key observation was the absence of youth voices in mainstream media discussions on the elections. Television and radio programmes focusing on the polls rarely featured young people as panellists, commentators or analysts. This lack of representation diminished the visibility of youth perspectives in public discourse and may have contributed to lower enthusiasm among young voters.

Recommendation

- Mainstream media should consider providing spaces for young people to have their voices heard by engaging them as panellists in sessions related to current affairs.

We observed that the general turnout of young people during election day was encouraging in some of the polling stations visited, with the majority voting late in the morning and afternoon. Although it cannot be confirmed, owing to the absence of voter turnout data, this observation aligns with the projected overall turnout for the election, as young people form a high percentage of the voting population.

On election day, a significant number of polling stations visited did not have young people among the polling staff. This lack of inclusion further reflects the minimal integration of youth in the core electoral process. However, in a few polling stations, young people were observed serving as candidate representatives, although most candidates did not have formal representation at polling stations. The presence of youth in these roles, albeit limited, demonstrates the potential for greater involvement if the right structures and incentives are put in place.

Civil society

Civil society contributes to free, fair and peaceful election processes. For the past six years, the CIVICUS Monitor has classified civic space in Gabon as 'repressed,' as a result of unwarranted restrictions on freedom of expression (e.g., suspension of media outlets, expelled foreign correspondents, internet restrictions during anti-government protests and in electoral contexts) and deterioration of the environment in which human rights defenders and CSOs operate.³⁹

The transitional government engaged with CSOs as part of its commitment and included them in the DNI, although it was reported that involvement was restricted to a limited number of selected organisations. Twenty-five seats in the Transitional National Assembly and 27 seats in the Senate are held by civil society representatives.⁴⁰

Observation of the role of CSOs in the presidential election in Gabon highlighted both commendable efforts and areas where significant improvements are needed. While CSOs made essential contributions to the electoral process, particularly through election observation and monitoring, their overall efficiency and impact were limited.

Over 2,500 citizen observers from 23 organisations were deployed during the election. Among the largest of these citizen observer groups were ROC and Tournons La Page, which deployed 546 and 216 citizen observers, respectively, across the country on election day. The Consortium of Civil Society Organisations for Electoral and Democratic Transparency in Gabon also had a large deployment of observers at polling centres during the election. We noted that some observers received training facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme, which helped equip them for their role. Civil society could benefit from additional training for

39 CIVICUS is a global alliance of CSOs and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society. The Monitor assess civil society space at country level. It scores countries out of 100 points, rating them in one of the following categories (open, 81-100 points; narrowed, 61-80 points; obstructed, 41-60 points; repressed, 21-40 points; closed, 1-20 points). In 2023, Gabon scored 40 points.

40 IPU Global Data on National Parliaments: Gabon.

future elections to enable it to handle the full scope of responsibilities required during an election. The short period for the overall electoral process can be seen as partially responsible for limitations here.

Recommendation

- Support for CSOs in Gabon could be enhanced.

Training of election observers should be continual. One notable role played by CSOs during the election was the establishment of situation rooms to monitor and analyse different aspects of the electoral process in real time. These initiatives allowed for more co-ordinated and responsive tracking of events on the ground, and it stands out as a good practice worth building upon in future elections.

Despite these efforts, the absence of well-structured engagements between electoral stakeholders such as the election-organising institutions, candidates and CSOs significantly limited the contribution of CSOs to the overall electoral process. Without clear avenues for collaboration, consultation or feedback, civil society actors were often left operating in isolation, unable to influence key aspects of election planning, implementation and, most likely, post-election review.

However, not all CSO activities during the elections adhered to the neutrality and impartiality principles crucial to maintaining public trust. We noted a few instances of civil society platforms promoting specific candidates. This undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the broader civil society movement and poses a risk to its requisite independence.

Recommendations

- CSOs might want to consider using their platforms to play their critical role as impartial and neutral contributors to development rather than as platform arenas for candidates.
- Development partners could consider providing capacity-building programmes for CSOs focusing on standard civil society ethics.
- Internal accountability mechanisms and codes of conduct for CSOs could be reinforced to prevent partisan bias and maintain public confidence in their activities.

5. The Campaign and the Media



COG members braved the elements to observe a campaign rally in Libreville

The campaign

As part of the transitional timeline announced by the CTRI on 13 November 2023, the presidential election was scheduled to take place in August 2025. However, following the adoption of the new Constitution in November 2024 and the adoption of the new Electoral Code in January 2025, the timetable for the presidential election was accelerated.

On 9 January 2025, the Transitional President, Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, announced that Gabon would hold the presidential election on 22 March 2025.⁴¹ However, on 22 January 2025, the Minister of Interior, Hermann Immongault, announced that the presidential election would be held on 12 April 2025.⁴² It was also announced that the election campaign period would run from 29 March 2025 to 11 April 2025,⁴³ resulting in an unprecedented and exceptionally short campaign period, lasting only two weeks.

Several stakeholders highlighted that the compressed campaign period was insufficient for all candidates to campaign adequately in all regions. This was compounded by the lack of a party structure to support candidates, the vastness of the Gabonese territory⁴⁴ and the lack of financial and human resources. It is the

41 VOA (2025) 'Gabon's Military Leader Announces March Election'. 10 January.

42 Reuters (2025) 'Gabon to hold Presidential Elections on April 12'. 23 January.

43 TRT (2025) 'Gabon Elections: Key Facts about Upcoming Presidential Polls'. 11 April.

44 Which consists of nine provinces, with some areas relatively remote and not easily accessible by road.

view of the Group that the shortened campaign period in Gabon's presidential election may have disadvantaged some candidates, by limiting their ability to mobilise support, communicate their platform and reach voters nationwide. Lesser-known contenders, who depend on extended outreach to build recognition, seem to be disproportionately affected, while established candidates, such as the incumbent, benefited from existing visibility and resources. International electoral standards emphasise adequate campaign durations to promote inclusivity and transparency.⁴⁵ The abbreviated timeline raises concern about the fairness of the process.

In contrast to previous elections in Gabon, the 2025 presidential election campaign was generally peaceful and there were no major reported incidents of violence. By 27 March 2025, six of the eight presidential candidates had signed a Voluntary Code of Conduct, pledging to uphold the principles of peace, integrity and respect for democratic institutions during the electoral period.⁴⁶ This was facilitated by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Stakeholders highlighted instances of misinformation and disinformation, particularly via digital platforms, but they were not pervasive (see further the Media section below). They also highlighted instances of inflammatory language against a female candidate whose application to contest the election was not successful. This could serve as a deterrent to other female candidates putting themselves forward to contest future elections.

We observed that candidates generally respected regulations to end campaigns on 11 April 2025, the day before election day, as stipulated in the Ministry of Interior' decree.

Legal framework

Electoral campaigns take place within the framework of the Constitution, the Communications Code and the Electoral Code. The Constitution guarantees, among other things, fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, assembly, association, opinion and participation in elections (see Chapter 3).

The Group sought to establish the measures put in place for the management of the 2025 presidential campaign or whether campaign expenditure had been declared by the candidates but was not successful. Without the effective and regular filing of campaign expenditure by candidates, it was almost impossible to know if the expenditure limits set in the Electoral Code had been complied with or not. Compliance with this provision of the Electoral Code may have a material bearing on the outcome of the elections.

Candidates

In accordance with Article 2 of the CTRL decree, declarations of candidacy to contest the presidential election were deposited from 27 February to 8 March 2025.⁴⁷

Twenty-three candidates applied, with only four initially approved: Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé, Joseph Lapensée Essingone, Stéphane Germain Iloko Boussengui and Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema. An additional four applicants were subsequently approved after appeal to the Constitutional Court, which handed down its decision on 21

45 International IDEA (2002) *International Electoral Standards: Guidelines for Reviewing the Legal Framework of Elections*.

46 International IDEA (2025) 'Gabon: The Code of Good Conduct for Presidential Candidates Reaches a New Goal'. 9 April.

47 Ministry of Interior and Security (2025) 'Presidential Elections of April 12, 2025: Procedures for Candidacy Declarations'.



Supporters at a campaign rally

March 2025.⁴⁸ These were Alain Simplicie Boungoueres, Zenaba Gninga Chaning, Axel Stophène Ibinga Ibinga and Thierry Yvon Michel Ngoma. For the first time in Gabon's electoral history, none of the candidates were members of a political party and all candidates contested as independents.

Campaign strategies and key issues

The key issues in the campaign were the economy, unemployment, poverty and inequality, corruption and access to social services such as healthcare and education. We noted that the 'coup de libération' had resonated with the Gabonese people and seemed to attract them to Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, whose campaign focused mainly on national unity and addressing Gabon's political and economic challenges. Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé focused on youth employment, institutional reform and responsible management of public finances; Stéphane Germain Iloko Boussengui focused on constitutional reforms, decentralisation and establishing an independent electoral commission to ensure transparent elections; and Joseph Lapensée Essingone focused on restoring state authority, modernising the judicial system, improving public finance management and reforming the education system. Zenaba Gninga Chaning focused on job creation, access to healthcare and the equitable distribution of wealth; Thierry Yvon Michel Ngoma focused on Gabon's autonomy and self-determination; Axel Stophène Ibinga Ibinga focused on family, civic and moral education, citizenship and youth, health, solidarity and social protection, taxation, debt and public spending. Alain Simplicie Boungoueres focused on national reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and institutional reform.

The 2025 presidential election campaign was characterised by door-to-door campaigns, community meetings, political rallies and the use of mainstream (radio, print, TV) and digital media to engage with voters. We observed, and stakeholders highlighted, that the incumbent, Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, launched a robust

48 Gabon24 (2025) 'Presidential Election in Gabon: 8 Candidates Officially in the Running'. 21 March.

campaign in all regions of Gabon. His campaign slogan, C'BON, meaning 'It is good' in French, was a play on his initials. Campaigns by the seven other candidates lacked the same level of reach and resources. The Group observed rallies organised by the incumbent and Zenaba Gninga Chaning, which were quite lively and peaceful.

We observed that most campaign materials, including posters, banners, billboards, T-shirts and caps, featured the incumbent. His rallies also appeared better resourced compared with those of the other candidates. The Group further noted that the incumbent took almost every outdoor advertising platform (e.g., billboards, mural advertising posts, poster-holding poles and mobile advertising avenues). In addition, campaign promotional materials such as T-shirts, caps, clothing items, etc. were pervasively noticeable for this candidate.

Several stakeholders, including candidate Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé, alleged that the incumbent used state resources to campaign, including helicopters and the media. This, it was said, allowed him to cover significantly more ground and dominate the campaign. The incumbent denied this assertion, however. Additionally, despite the regulations on campaign financing, stakeholders emphasised that enforcement mechanisms were not exercised.

Recommendations

- In accordance with international good practice, elections should not be called within six months of major changes to the legislative framework for elections. This would allow for proper sensitisation of all stakeholders on the content and important changes, and for adequate provisions to be made for training and education.
- Adequate time should be given for an election campaign, in line with international good practice; Given Gabon's logistical constraints, a longer campaign period was crucial to ensuring fair competition and counterbalancing the inherent advantages of incumbents or well-resourced candidates.
- Provisions restrictions on the use of state resources in an election campaign should be strictly adhered to.
- The authorities should consider lowering the campaign expenditure limits from current levels. In this regard, the Group recommends that the campaign limits be brought within the limits applicable in the region or benchmark the most appropriate limits relevant to the Gabonese circumstances.
- Authorities should provide for a regular filing of campaign expenditure limits with the relevant authority and publish such a determination together with a notice calling and setting a date for each election.
- Clear, enforceable rules around campaign finance and political advertising should be introduced, including on:
 - potential state funding for political parties and independent candidates to create fair competition;
 - a cap on paid media placements per candidate;
 - mandatory disclosure of media ad spending;
 - public financing or media vouchers to ensure all candidates can access essential media platforms.



Women supporters at a campaign rally

Media landscape

Gabon has an enormous media landscape for its small population. The country of 2.3 million people has a total of 31 television stations, 67 radio stations and 1.3 million internet users,⁴⁹ comprising 60 per cent of the population⁵⁰ The country has more than 60 print media outlets⁵¹ and 179 online media outlets. These outlets are regulated by the HAC under Article 47 of the Constitution.

Despite media authority claims of enhanced press freedoms, an independent press as defined by human rights standards is not fully realised in Gabon. This is particularly apparent in an analysis of the 2025 presidential election coverage and its lead-up. While there has been a significant decrease in government influence since the August 2023 coup d'état, with Gabon climbing in the global rankings of press freedom from 94th to 41st out of 180 countries in 2025,⁵² journalists still retreat to self-censorship despite the shift towards more open media practices.

Recommendations

Strengthen legal protections for journalists through:

- a journalists' protection law that explicitly prohibits arbitrary detention, harassment or surveillance for reporting;
- a confidential whistleblower system for media professionals to report censorship or intimidation;
- legal support services for journalists facing threats.

Legal framework for media coverage

Gabon's new Electoral Code mandates that all state-owned traditional media outlets provide equal coverage to each candidate running for election.⁵³ This law is intended to create a level playing field, allowing voters to make informed decisions based on comprehensive information about all candidates. The legal requirements include balanced reporting, equal airtime and non-partisan coverage, especially in the lead-up to elections. However, the effectiveness of these regulations remains in doubt.

49 By December 2021.

50 BBC (2023) 'Gabon Media Guide'.

51 Reporters Without Borders (2025) 'Gabon'.

52 Reporters Without Borders (2025) 'World Press Freedom Index 2025'.

53 Article 14 of the Electoral Code



Newspaper kiosk in Libreville

Despite the legal stipulations for fair coverage, anecdotal evidence suggests a significant imbalance in the media's representation of candidates, particularly favouring the incumbent. Reports indicate that, during the campaign, media outlets, especially those owned by the state or politically aligned with the new government, were predominantly focused on the current leadership, overshadowing opposition candidates.

Private vs public media dynamics

Gabon 24, a government-owned media house, hosted special programming in the week leading up to election day featuring each of the eight candidates in a one-hour interview format: 'Un candidat, un projet.' Ratings peaked during two specific episodes, the interview with the incumbent and the interview with the sole female candidate. One stakeholder suggested the female candidate's interview was seen as a 'curiosity,' which may have led to increased viewership. This speaks to the overall lack of female representation within the political landscape. Content from the TV interviews consistently drove political coverage in both public and private newspapers throughout the week.

In terms of privately owned outlets, while these in theory had more freedom, the skewed political coverage favouring the incumbent was, according to stakeholder engagement, an editorial directive from respective bosses. This apparent favouritism raises concerns about whether the existing laws are being enforced, and whether media outlets are adhering to the principles of impartiality and fairness, as stipulated by the Constitution and the law.

Recommendations

The HAC should consider rigorously enforcing and monitoring compliance with equal airtime laws during election campaigns. This includes:

- real-time audits of coverage time across media outlets;
- public release of weekly media balance reports during campaigns;
- penalties for non-compliance, including fines or temporary suspension of broadcast licences.

Biased media coverage

Reasons for the unbalanced coverage in traditional media, as described by various public and private stakeholders, lie in the financial resources of the candidates and the overall national post-coup perspective. Both groups of respondents shared the view that the incumbent had 'freed' the country from the stronghold of the political dynasty – indeed, the coup itself, despite an unconstitutional takeover, is described by media outlets, most civil society stakeholders and private citizens as a 'coup de liberation.' Both private and public media stakeholders expressed similar comments in explaining the nationalist shift suggesting that, for the public and for journalists, the transition period had been 'like a national reconciliation, we think about our country first.'

As a result, there was barely any distinction in pro-government coverage between state-run and private news outlets.

Money also played a significant role. Private outlets, according to their stakeholders, still struggle with financial dependencies and pressures that limit their ability to provide unbiased coverage or to fully challenge the political status quo. Anecdotally, journalists revealed that they were paid as much as US\$100 by some candidates to cover their press conferences. This financial exchange was described as 'transportation money.'

The financial imbalance between the incumbent and other candidates also impacted the amount of coverage, according to stakeholders. As described by one media stakeholder, 'This is a business' – so an outlet will make airtime available but it depends on the price. By all reports, the incumbent had far greater financial means to flood the media environment with his campaign message of 'restoration' and benefited from positive portrayals reinforcing government narratives. Conversely, other candidates lacked sufficient campaign finance, and the necessary machinery, limiting their ability to travel the country to hold campaign rallies and to mount advertising campaigns.

As already noted, print and television media actors filed reports on opposition accusations that the incumbent was using public funds, as well as state resources including cars, helicopters and the military, to facilitate his campaign. These accusations were denied by the government.

Post-election results, Gabonese media also covered a press conference by the candidate who came in a distant second (Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé), who argued that the fairness of the campaign was undermined by finance imbalances, with 'one candidate campaigning at the taxpayers' expense while others had to rely on their personal means.'

According to stakeholders, the disparity in media coverage between the incumbent and other candidates most probably led to a skewed perception of electoral candidates. Citizens received a narrowed viewpoint, heavily influenced by the transitional government. This situation undermines the electoral process and could lead to the manipulation of voters who rely on media to see diverse perspectives and choices (see Chapter 3).

Advertising campaigns were also largely skewed to the incumbent. Posters, billboards and campaign merchandise (clothing, T-shirts, hats) were almost exclusively in support of the incumbent. As indicated by authorities, there are mechanisms to monitor paid advertisements so that candidates with greater financial means do not have an unfair advantage. However, little or no evidence of enforcement in this regard was observed.

Recommendations

We encourage the creation of an appropriate, independent, multistakeholder body that includes journalists, civil society and observers to:

- monitor political coverage across media platforms;
- investigate and report media bias or censorship in real time;
- provide protective backing for journalists reporting on sensitive issues.

Coverage of marginalised groups

A critical aspect of media fairness highlighted in the context of the Gabon 2025 presidential election relates to the representation of women, youth and marginalised communities, particularly PWDs, as guaranteed in Article 6 of the Constitution. Stakeholders voiced concerns regarding the lack of media attention to issues that impacted these sectors of society in the lead-up to the elections. As a result, these individuals believe they experienced barriers to participation in the political processes, including inaccessibility of information and representation.

The media's role in advocating for such marginalised voices is vital. Comprehensive electoral coverage should also highlight the needs and rights of citizens with disabilities. There seemed to be no consistency in the approach to sign language interpreters on either public or private television programming. Stakeholders, particularly the visually and hearing impaired, indicated that their stories and perspectives were rarely included in the broader electoral narrative. Failure to cover these issues therefore limited the scope of democratic engagement and neglected the rights of an important segment of the population.

A media awareness campaign was carried out in Libreville high schools to help young people understand the voting process, but stakeholders admitted that overall they focused very little attention on the youth vote in their coverage.

Recommendations

- We encourage media outlets to dedicate a minimum percentage of coverage to marginalised groups and their specific needs, particularly during election cycles.
- Sign language interpretation should be required on major political broadcasts.
- Training for journalists on inclusive reporting practices should be funded and supported.

Media expansion in local languages

French is the official language in Gabon. However, not every citizen speaks French as their first language: there are approximately 43 local languages in the country. However, it is commendable that the transition government increased funding for



A selection of dailies and weeklies from across Gabon

public media to allow, among other things, rural radio outlets to broadcast in local languages. This is a positive shift to increase better understanding of the electoral process to those in rural communities with limited access to wider coverage.

Election day coverage

Media from both public and private outlets dispatched journalists across the country to cover election day developments. Online news services filed updates throughout the day while radio and TV outlets held wall-to-wall coverage.

Our observer team was present when approximately 150 citizens who were still waiting for their voter registration cards on the morning of the election became increasingly agitated in front of the Provincial Electoral Commission office. There was a significant presence of security personnel to keep the crowd under control. After noticing our documenting of the incident, plain-clothes police officers surrounded

our observer team demanding that the iPhone footage of the incident taken as part of our observer mandate be deleted. While this may be an isolated incident, we caution that such actions constitute a violation of free speech and the right to record public events. This example is also consistent with concerns of censorship expressed by Gabonese journalists; it may explain in small measure why Gabonese journalists self-censor and contradicts laws legislating greater press freedoms.

Environment for reporters

In assessing the state of press freedom in Gabon, particularly leading up to the 2025 presidential election, it is essential to reflect on the country's historical landscape. Stakeholders consistently emphasised that, under previous repressive governments, journalists were often the first targets. Members of the press who exercised their professional duties were routinely suspended, arrested and, in some cases, subjected to torture. Independent media were silenced, with no access to state resources, and no outlet dared challenge the Bongo family's grip on power and tight control over media ownership. Even outside the country, exiled journalists were forced to use pseudonyms to report safely.

Since the political transition following the August 2023 coup, there has been a notable shift. No journalists have been suspended or imprisoned, and many now report feeling free to practise their profession without overt political pressure. Although many acknowledge that self-censorship persists, they describe a growing sense of democratic openness. Reporters acknowledged improved access to information and stated that interview requests with government officials were typically granted promptly, signalling cautious progress towards a more open media environment.

Recommendations

- Increase access to information for journalists, which could include:
 - journalists' right to access public data and official records;
 - government agencies responding to media inquiries within a specified timeframe;
 - all ministries having dedicated media liaison officers;
 - regular press briefings during the electoral period.
- Establish ongoing journalism training programmes, focused on electoral reporting, including:
 - workshops on ethical reporting, fact-checking and combating disinformation;
 - mentorship opportunities with experienced political reporters;
 - partnerships with international media training organisations to share best practices.

Social media

Social media has evolved into an essential component of personal and public interactions in Gabon. Political parties have recognised the importance of social media as an integral political campaigning and messaging tool.⁵⁴

54 Otomo, C. (2024) « Facebook, un nouvel outil de la campagne électorale au Gabon ? ».



Voter scrolling through social media

Stakeholders observed that, in the current context in Gabon, social media was used as a complementary tool alongside traditional media, especially TV and radio, which remain influential.

During the presidential election campaign, social media reflected the prevalent traditional media and offline trends. Social media campaigns were dominated by the incumbent, who utilised consistent, high-production-value public relations content. This was followed by Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé and Zeinab Gninga Chaning's campaigns, which utilised Facebook as their main social media tools for campaigning.

During the presidential campaign and the aftermath, there were no internet blackouts or throttling of bandwidth, which is commendable. In the past, blackouts have been imposed, particularly on 26 August 2023, after the presidential polls. The internet was only restored five days later. Blackouts were also initiated in 2021, 2019 and 2016.⁵⁵

Stakeholders emphasised the lack of clarity on which government agencies had purview over internet connectivity as a concern. HAC informed us it did not have control over the internet or assessing online content. While not entirely transparent, decision-making on connectivity currently lies with the Ministry of Interior. Stakeholders with access to the Ministry said it was unlikely that HAC would be consulted before any blackouts were deployed.

Social media overview and usage patterns

By the beginning of 2025, there were 1.84 million individual internet users in Gabon, equivalent to 71.9 per cent online penetration.⁵⁶ There were 3.19 million active mobile connections, equivalent to 124 per cent of the population at the start of 2025. There were 782,000 social media user identities located in Gabon, which is 30.5 per cent of

⁵⁵ <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/keepiton-authorities-in-gabon-elections/>

⁵⁶ Kemp, S. (2025) Digital 2025: Gabon.

the population, or 52.7 per cent of the population above the age of 18. Of the user identities, 43.4 per cent identified as female and 56.6 per cent as male. Between early 2024 and the beginning of 2025, social media user identities in Gabon increased by 30,000 (4.1 per cent).

Data sourced from Meta establish that there were 782,000 Facebook users in Gabon, which is equivalent to the total number of social media user identities located in Gabon. Facebook remains by far the biggest social media platform in the country. Messenger had 277,000 users. Instagram, also owned by Meta, had 147,000 users. The Meta-owned messaging app, WhatsApp, is widely used in Gabon, though verified user figures were not available. There were 280,000 LinkedIn members but the platform did not figure in election-related content. X (formerly known as Twitter) had 27,500 users, or a reach equivalent to 1.1 per cent of the population.

There were 179 online media outlets operating in Gabon as per HAC records.

There is ambiguity over which government agency has oversight over social media content. HAC does not have the same jurisdiction as it does over traditional media. It is unclear whether HAC's role extends to social media content hosted by print, TV and radio outlets. Stakeholders expressed their view that the Ministry of Interior was responsible for evaluating social media content. HAC did not provide any guidelines on social media during campaigning or polling or in the post-election period.

Social media usage during the presidential election campaign

Social media platforms, especially Facebook, Instagram and X, were used by the frontrunner and the eventual winner Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema and his closest contenders during the campaign. As with the offline campaign, the incumbent dominated the social media space. Stakeholders said that the incumbent had an advantage even before the short campaign got underway because of what they termed as 'surrogate' supporters posting or reposting favourable content online and because of access to a large campaign resource pool.

Facebook

When the polls opened, the incumbent's official Facebook page had 77,000 followers. Content on the page during the campaign gained a high level of traction compared with for other candidates. A video of the incumbent speaking at a rally in Libreville on 10 April 2025 had 846 likes, 128 shares and 421 comments by the time polls opened.

'C'Bon – Gabon 2025,' Nguema's official presidential campaign page, had 9,000 likes and 15,000 followers.

First Lady Zita Oligui Nguema's official Facebook page had 121,000 followers. The last post on the page before polls opened, a promotional video raising support among female voters for her spouse, had gained 230 likes, 36 shares and 40 comments overnight when polls opened.

The Nguema campaign benefited from unofficial content, like the amateur video that went viral of the candidate dancing on stage. Such content was supported by professionally produced videos, indicative of a campaign that was managed professionally.

The official Facebook page of Alain-Claude Bilie-By- Nzé, had acquired 34,000 followers by the time polls opened. However, this page remained dormant, with the last post uploaded on 17 February 2017. It was not used for campaigning. Another Facebook page linked to his campaign website had gained 10,000 followers and 5,000 likes. The last post on the page before polls opened of the candidate campaigning in rural areas had 149 likes, 18 comments and 15 shares.

The Facebook page of Zenaba Gninga Chaning, the only female candidate, had accumulated 1,200 likes and 2,800 followers by the time polling opened. The last post on the page, a video of a campaign rally, had 21 likes, 2 comments and 1 share.

Instagram

Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema's Instagram account had 121,000 followers. Though not as widely used as the Facebook account, it gained significantly higher traction than profiles of opposing candidates. A post on 31 March 2025 had 1,538 likes, 21 comments and 92 shares.

In contrast, Alain-Claude Bilie-By-Nzé's Instagram following stood at 347 followers. The last post on the profile, uploaded a day before polls opened, received 44 likes and 5 shares.

X (formerly Twitter)

Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema's X profile had 17,900 followers. The last post on the profile before the election, posted on 31 March 2025, received 28 comments, 14 reposts and 62 likes.

Alain-Claude Billie By Nzé's profile had 301 followers. The profile did not appear to have been used extensively for election-related content.

TikTok

Brice Oligui Nguema was the only candidate to use TikTok extensively. The profile under 'C'BON PRESIDENT' had 53,400 followers and 322,000 likes.

WhatsApp

Stakeholders stated that WhatsApp was used widely in Gabon, though verified data remains unavailable. WhatsApp groups were active as internal closed communication channels among political parties, activists' groups and others. Media outlets used similar channels to disseminate their content.

WhatsApp messaging groups are also popular among the public; such groups can be easy vectors to seed misinformation, disinformation and abusive content. However, there was no evidence that they were used for this purpose extensively during the campaign period.

Traditional media outlets online

Traditional media outlets are growing their online presence. Online media outlets are also gaining a significant foothold in the Gabonese information architecture.

Groupe Gabon Télévision's Facebook page has 180,000 followers. The page of Gabon 24, an online media outlet, has acquired 122,000 likes. Both pages posted extensive reportage on the campaign, the polls and results. Gabon 24's TikTok profile has 175,000 followers and 783,000 likes. The profile featured a high number content linked to the incumbency but had content from other candidates as well.

Online media is likely to play a significant role in the Gabonese community in the future. The Group observed ordinary citizens in regional locations like Mouila and Ndende using mobile phones to check social media updates on polling, especially when results started to come in. Bandwidth did not appear to be an impediment, especially for simple social media activity.

Hashtags

The following hashtags were widely used during the presidential election campaign. Hashtags linked to content on the incumbent once again featured prominently among them.

#BrefCBON

#Gabon2025

#CBON2025

#Le12CestLe12

#FrancevilleMobilisé

#UnitéEtProgrès

Usage during campaign and polling day

Facebook was the most extensively used platform. Candidates used the reach of their profiles and those that supported them to disseminate content. The three candidates that used the platform the most were Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, Alain-Claude Billie By Nzé and Zenaba Gninga Chaning. Of the three, the incumbent Nguema used the platform the most and gained the majority support.

Candidates posted campaign stops, speeches and other content regularly. There was also the use of Facebook features like Facebook Live. Zenaba Gninga Chaning used this to livestream her final rally. The Nguema campaign did the same for him and his spouse, casting their votes and interacting with supporters after results had begun to come in. Candidates also posted videos of them directly addressing voters.

Misinformation, disinformation and harassing content

Our Group did not observe significant levels of misinformation, disinformation or harassing content visible during the campaign. This assessment is supported by stakeholders, who said there was limited presence of inflammatory content but it was not completely absent.

Content monitoring by International IDEA⁵⁷ tracked disinformation over three platforms – Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok. Between 17 March and 11 April 2025, the unit tabulated 42 posts containing disinformation. There was a marked increase during the last week, with 26 posts detected. The unit also created follow-up content debunking the false content.

Two incidents, relayed by stakeholders, illustrate the nature of the misinformation, disinformation and harassing content during the campaign. One female candidate whose candidacy was rejected was mocked on social media. And April Fool's-related content falsely claimed that all opponents had decided to support the incumbent's candidacy.

57 La Cellule de Veille « Rapport mensuel synthétique ».

Stakeholders reasoned that the low level of false and abusive content during the campaign owed to the overwhelming support the incumbent president enjoyed. They said that opposition views were not widely present online also because none of the incumbent's opponents could match the resources the Nguema campaign had access to.

The presidential election campaign period was largely peaceful. There were few incidents of misinformation, disinformation, abusive content and potential censorship. Nevertheless, there is a need to take proactive measures to ensure online space remains safe, devoid of inflammatory, divisive and abusive content at future elections. The dangers posed by such content are potentially heightened when the playing field reflects a much more splintered support base among different candidates.

Restrictions/intimidation

On 5 February 2025, Fanuel Ikapi Mamboundou, who uses the online name Novelas Overmax, was remanded in custody for posting a video of a power blackout at a hospital in Libreville. He was released a week later but his lawyer said that his family was denied access while he was on remand. The bail was also approved allegedly under strict conditions.⁵⁸

Stakeholders felt online critics and dissent were subdued because ordinary citizens and social media users did not want to risk isolation and being targeted by vitriolic content.

Campaign-related content

We observed that the online space was dominated by content favourable to the incumbent. This dominance took place in the absence of clarity on election-related guidelines for social media usage, including paid and sponsored content. Gabon's electoral law stipulates fair and balanced coverage in traditional media. However, lack of clarity in respect of social media platforms means there is potential for unregulated campaign spending online, overwhelming opposing candidates. Such a skewed online space during a keenly contested election could lead to online and offline tensions.

Recommendations

In line with international good practice,⁵⁹ Gabonese authorities may wish to consider introducing guidelines or legislation to address misinformation, disinformation, abusive content, harassing content, unauthorised releases and compromising personal details on social media, particularly during election campaigns.

58 www.union.sonapresse.com/fr/novelas-overmax-libere-mais-pas-encore-hors-de-danger

59 Such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

6. Voting, Counting and Results

The 2025 presidential election was decreed on 23 January 2025, under the provisions of the Electoral Code. This meant that preparations for this election had to be concluded in 78 days (between 24 March and 11 April 2025). This required a herculean effort on the part of the CNO CER, which is to be commended for ensuring that this challenge was met.

Several key activities in the electoral calendar were set, among others:

- establishment of the CNO CER;
- nomination of candidates and submission of their lists to the CNO CER;
- finalisation of lists of candidates by the CNO CER;
- filing and determination of appeals to the decisions of the CNO CER concerning the lists of candidates;
- establishment of authorities contemplated in law whenever a presidential election has been decreed (establishment of all electoral commissions, ACER, HAC, etc.);
- recruitment and training of polling officers;
- identifying and confirming polling stations to be used in the 2025 presidential election;
- issuing of a decree concerning the campaign period;
- general logistical preparations.

Ahead of the Group's deployment across the country, it undertook a series of fact-finding visits and briefing sessions. These sessions enabled us to gather information on election preparations and the electoral environment in Gabon and informed our deployment plan.

Pre-polling procedures

Preparations for the orderly conduct of voting entail, among others:

- collection of all polling materials from the local commission, either the night before (for stations that are far-flung and difficult to access) or in the early hours of the morning on election day (for those at a shorter distance and easier to access);
- setting up of the polling station as provided for in the Standard Polling Station Layout prescribed by the Minister of Interior;
- preparation and layout of the election materials;
- sealing of ballot boxes in the presence of observers, candidates' representatives and the media (the absence of any of these stakeholders does not lead to a delay in the opening and functioning of the station);



The COG Chairperson, HE Danny Faure, viewing voter lists on display outside a polling station

- authentication of the ballot papers bearing the signatures of the president and the two vice-presidents.

Each polling station had five polling officers: a president, two vice-presidents and two assessors. It was mandatory to have a member of the ACER present in each polling station. Presence of candidate representatives and observers was optional.

Members of the security forces were provided with seats outside the polling station.

We noted that poll openings were peaceful, and most opened within 45 minutes of the required time, though there were isolated cases of longer delays before opening. We found that, in a number of polling centres, delays were attributed to incomplete pre-poll procedures, including authentication of ballot papers by polling station staff.

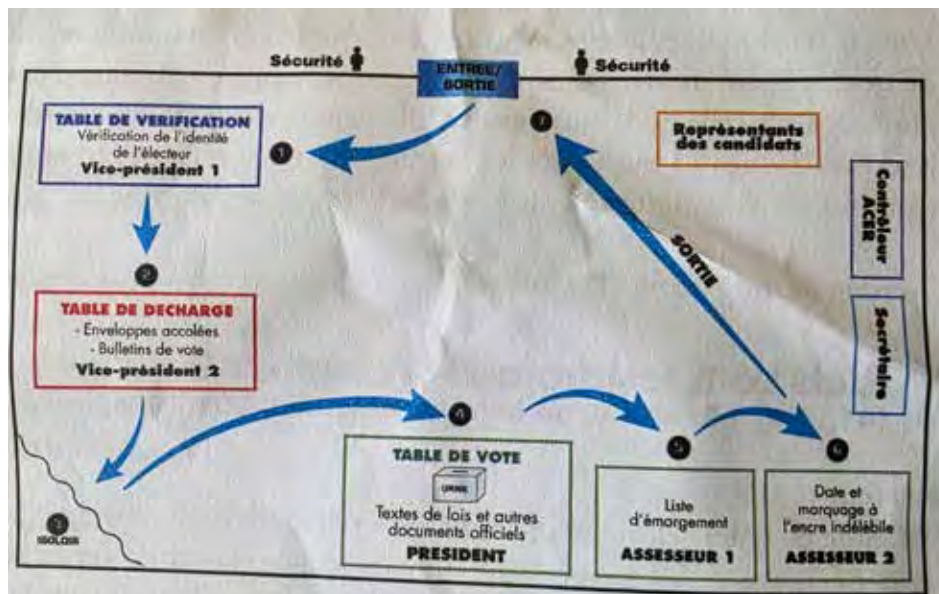


Voters queue outside a polling station

Polling procedures

Polling stations are laid out in Gabon, using a standard layout (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Standard polling station layout in Gabon
(source: Ministry of Interior)

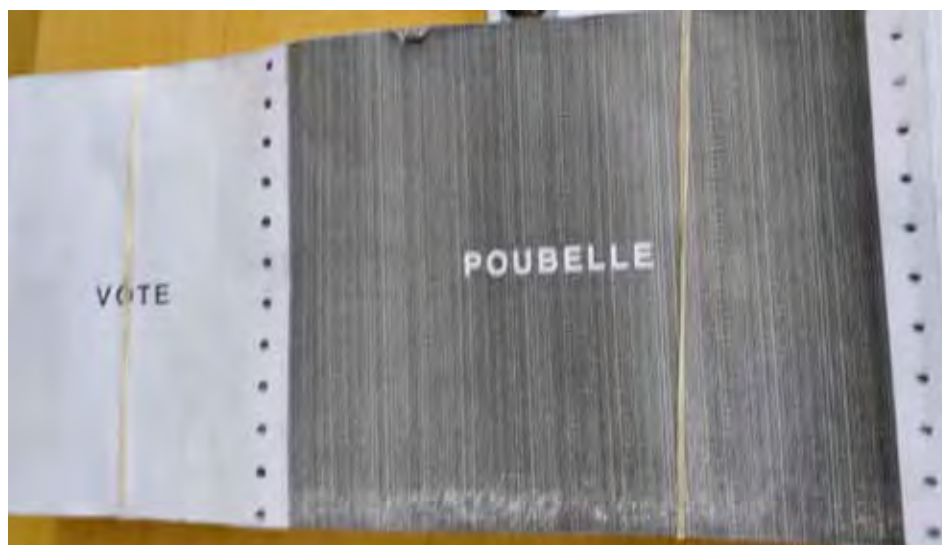


The standard polling process is as follows:

- A voter walks into the station and reports to Table 1 (number 1 in Figure 6.1 above), which is managed by vice-president 1 of the polling station. The voter must produce his/her voter's card or other acceptable forms of identification (e.g., passport) at this point. If the voter produces any identification other than a voter's card, vice-president 1 will check if there is an uncollected voter's card bearing the identity of the voter and, if so, will hand the card to the voter and record the voter as having come to the station.
- The voter then proceeds to Table 2 (number 2 in Figure 6.1 above), which is managed by vice-president 2. The voter is then handed a ballot paper for each of the candidates (a total of eight in the 2025 presidential election), and an envelope. The ballot papers must be authenticated, as bearing the signatures of three polling officials (president and two vice-presidents). Vice-president 2 then explains the voting process to the voter and directs him/her to the polling booth.
- The voter enters the voting booth to seal the candidate of his/her choice in a white slot in the envelope provided by vice-president 2. This is done in secret. Where a voter has indicated that he/she will need assistance, such a voter can be assisted accordingly.⁶⁰ The voter then proceeds to the voting table (number 4 in Figure 6.1 above).
- The president of the polling station is responsible for managing Table 3. The sealed envelope, with the voter's presidential candidate choice isolated in the white section of the envelope and the rest of the ballots (seven in all) isolated in the black section of the envelope, is cast into the sealed ballot box (see Figure 6.2 on page 75).

⁶⁰ Article 145 of the Electoral Code.

Figure 6.2: Voting envelope used in 2025 Presidential Election in Gabon (source: Ministry of Interior)



- The voter then proceeds to the next table (number 5 in figure on previous page), which is operated by assessor 1, who marks the voter's attendance on the voters' list as having cast a ballot in the election. The voter signs off the voters' list used for this purpose at this point and proceeds to assessor 2 at the next table (number 6 in Figure 6.1).
- Assessor 2 then marks the voter with indelible ink on the finger and lets the voter mark the voters' list with an inked thumbprint, confirming that he/she voted in the election. After this, the voter exits the polling station.
- The polling station has a desk for an ACER member. Observers and candidate representatives are also accommodated inside the polling station. The figure below shows an example of the standard polling station layout presented above in Figure 6.1.



Rural station in Bitam, 12 April 2025

Polling in diplomatic and foreign missions

For a presidential election, the Electoral Code provides for qualifying Gabonese citizens living abroad to vote at diplomatic and consular missions.⁶¹ Diplomatic or consular polling stations, like the rest of the Gabonese territory, deploy five polling officials, and polling proceeds on the same basis as in the country.

When polling ends, counting and results determination follow immediately. The results are then announced at that diplomatic or consular mission. Immediately after the results are announced, a results report is displayed at the headquarters of the diplomatic mission or consular post. The Electoral Code further provides that the President of the Consular Electoral Commission must announce the election results at the headquarters of the diplomatic mission or consular post.⁶²

We met with the Minister of Interior before the Group's deployment in Gabon. The Minister indicated that polling would be conducted at 25 diplomatic and consular commissions. However, we did not observe polling at diplomatic or consular missions.

Proxy voting

Proxy voting is a dispensation provided for in the Electoral Code.⁶³ Voters qualify for a proxy vote on the following conditions:⁶⁴

- voters away from the polling station at which they are registered on election day;
- voters who are sick, women in childbirth and PWDs unable to travel to the polling station on election day;
- persons in preventive detention and prisoners serving a sentence that does not result in disqualification from voting;
- any citizen whose professional or family commitments make it impossible for them to be present at the polling station on election day.

A voter applying for a proxy vote should have been registered and enlisted on the voters' list in that particular polling station. The person exercising the proxy must also be on the same segment of the voters' list in that polling station. Voters can only apply for proxy voting in person, along with the person who will cast their proxy vote.

We observed that proxy voting is a noteworthy measure to accommodate some categories of voters who would otherwise be disenfranchised. In the context of Gabon, proxy voting appears to be somewhat confused with special voting for PWDs, the bedridden, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. In our view, proxy voting does not serve the needs of these categories of people, in that it renders their right to vote in secret null and void, when they could be exercising their right in person and in secrecy, under special conditions, which the Electoral Code has not provided for.

We observed instances of proxy votes being disqualified mainly because either the applicant or the person exercising the proxy did not sign the proxy application form, or the president of the polling station was not provided with such an application.

61 Article 43 of the Electoral Code.

62 Article 26 of the Electoral Code.

63 Articles 146–149.

64 Article 146 of the Electoral Code.

Recommendations

- Retain the proxy voting franchise in the Electoral Code.
- Consider making provisions in the Electoral Code to accommodate the needs of Gabonese citizens with disabilities, the bedridden, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. in a way that will allow them to cast their votes themselves and in secrecy.
- Strengthen the administration of proxy voting applications to ensure such voters are not easily disenfranchised.

Availability and sharing of election data

We observed that election-related information such as statistics on the number and categories of voters on the voters' list (e.g., women, men, youth, distribution of registration per province or local commission, etc.) was not made public. We consider the availability of election-related data a lifeline in any election, as it is used by candidates, the media, the public and the international community to assess the election environment and preparations overall.

Recommendation

- The CNOCER should consider assessing the information needs of its stakeholders in an election and seek to make such data available on media accessible to its stakeholders (e.g., Ministry or CNOCER website, regular press briefings or statements, etc.).



Polling official with ballot box

Election day

Setting up polling stations

Depending on the terrain, weather and logistics complexities impacting the organisation and conduct of elections, polling stations in Gabon are set up either the day before election day or before polling stations open on election day. We observed preparations from the early hours of the morning in several stations.

Ahead of election day, we met with key Local Commission officials. We were apprised of the overall preparations and plans to set up the polling stations to ensure polling would not be delayed. In this process, we observed the logistical activities unfolding at the Local Commission level.

On election day, we noted the presence of many other observer groups at the poll opening. In our view, most polling centres opened within 45 minutes of the required period, though there were isolated cases of longer delays.

Polling officials, ACER, candidate representatives and observers

We observed that:

- Although no disaggregated data on election statistics was published, there seemed to be fair representation of women and youth at polling stations.
- Polling officers and candidate representatives were not always readily identifiable in the polling stations. ACER personnel were, however, easily identifiable. In some polling stations, representatives from the Ministry of Interior were also present and could be identified. It is good international practice for polling officials to be easily identifiable.
- Additionally, some poll officials were unclear about procedures, raising concerns about their training. These issues risk undermining electoral integrity, as proper accreditation and training are essential for transparent and credible elections.
- In instances where the law or polling station instructions were not followed, ACER members should have intervened to resolve the situation on the spot. However, the Group noted that this seldom happened, as evidenced in a number of cases, such as of simple omissions like failure to seal ballot boxes before the commencement of voting, suboptimal layout of the voting station in some places, assistance sometimes rendered by security forces personnel or candidate representatives in polling stations and misapplication of the Electoral Code concerning the non-admission of observers generally, but more specifically regarding the closing of the polling and counting processes, among others.
- Representatives of presidential candidates were not found at all polling stations; those found were largely representing the incumbent. Overall, they were diligent in the conduct of their duties.
- There was a visible presence of citizen observers deployed for this election. We noted and commend the efforts of citizen observers deployed for this election.

Recommendations

- All polling staff should be clearly identifiable, and this should be applied evenly across all polling stations. This will allow voters and observers to readily confirm the officials' legitimacy and designated roles, thereby reinforcing the integrity of the polling procedures.
- Provide all election staff with comprehensive, user-friendly manuals or quick-reference materials that clearly delineate standardised procedures. These documents should offer systematic, step-by-step guidance for routine tasks – such as verifying voter eligibility, distributing ballots and resolving disputes – thereby reducing ambiguity and promoting consistent adherence to established protocols.
- The ACER or a future independent body should routinely conduct unannounced spot checks to evaluate staff compliance with established procedures and offer real-time corrective guidance as needed. Persistent non-compliance or recurrent errors should be systematically recorded and remedied through formal feedback mechanisms or appropriate disciplinary actions.
- Conduct voter education initiatives that proactively inform citizens about the anticipated identification and responsibilities of polling staff, as well as the official mechanisms for reporting discrepancies. Such measures will enable voters to recognise and appropriately raise concerns regarding any improperly trained or unauthorised individuals at polling stations.
- Sustained voter education initiatives should be conducted through multiple channels to ensure citizens are fully informed of their rights and electoral procedures. These measures would help foster a more inclusive, transparent and credible electoral environment.
- Election observers and civil society groups should continue to be encouraged to observe the electoral process to enhance transparency and accountability.



Voter casting her ballot

Voting process

We applied the relevant provisions of the Electoral Code and the guidelines encapsulated in the standard polling station layout in Gabon, as explained earlier in this chapter, in observing the voting process and noted that those who were in the queue at poll closing at 6pm were allowed to vote. There were instances of the polls closing late for various reasons, including because of late opening.

In addition, there were instances of aberrations in polling stations (e.g., use of unsealed ballot boxes, observers not permitted to observe the process unhindered, etc.). We noted that the ACER personnel could easily have addressed some of these infringements of the Electoral Code but did not always intervene.

Recommendations

- The Minister and the relevant Gabonese authorities to consider retaining all the structures that are necessary for the conduct of elections, in anticipation of the imminent legislative and local government elections.
- Debrief on the 2025 voting process and implement the lessons learnt in preparing for the immediate next round of elections.

Ballot papers

The Groups noted that the ballot paper, bifurcated into dual compartments, introduced unnecessary complexity into the electoral process. A unified ballot would enhance clarity, minimise errors, reduce voter confusion and ensure greater efficiency in both the casting and the counting of votes. Research in electoral design consistently demonstrates that simplified ballot structures minimise errors and improve accessibility for all voters, regardless of literacy or familiarity with the voting system. Moreover, a single ballot reduces administrative burdens, mitigates the risk of invalid or misplaced votes and upholds the fundamental democratic principle of straightforward and transparent elections. Therefore, consolidating the ballot into a singular, coherent format not only is pragmatically advantageous but also aligns with good practice in electoral integrity.

The practice of polling officials physically signing ballot papers, though intended to authenticate votes, proves inefficient and inadequate for ensuring electoral integrity. Manual signatures are time-consuming, prone to human error and vulnerable to forgery or inconsistency, undermining their reliability. Modern or alternative solutions, such as stamping, barcodes, digital watermarking or blockchain, offer more secure, transparent and efficient verification. While traditional methods persist, electoral reforms should prioritise advanced, tamper-evident systems to strengthen trust in democratic processes.

Recommendations

- Consider the adoption of a unified ballot to enhance clarity, reduce voter confusion and ensure greater efficiency in both the casting and the counting of votes.
- Consider replacing manual verification with modern or alternative solutions, such as stamping, barcodes, digital watermarking or blockchain, for more secure, transparent and efficient verification.



Voter showing his thumb after casting his ballot

- Consider adopting cryptographic verification techniques, such as digitally signed ballots or biometric authentication, which can provide more precise and tamper-proof confirmation of voter identity.
- Consider implementing secure voter authentication protocols, including two-factor verification, should be implemented to prevent unauthorised individuals from submitting fraudulent ballots.

Security arrangements

The Group noted that the involvement of security personnel in the polling process and their heavy deployment of security personnel around polling stations created an atmosphere of intimidation, potentially discouraging voter participation. The Group considers the involvement of security personnel in the polling process as potentially further eroding trust in the electoral system, as it blurs the line between maintaining order and influencing electoral outcomes.

Recommendation

- security arrangements should be carefully calibrated to ensure they do not discourage participation; law enforcement presence should be discreet, professional and strictly neutral, with clear guidelines to prevent any perception of coercion.

Post-election operations

The Electoral Code provides that, following the close of polling, the president of the polling station must proceed to open the ballot boxes and prepare for counting. This must be done in public in the presence of polling officers and the representatives of



Voters waiting patiently to cast their ballot

the candidates. This is done by counting the envelopes in the ballot boxes with note taken of the authentication signatures on each of the ballots cast. If the number of envelopes counted is greater than the number of registered voters, this must be noted in the minutes.⁶⁵

We noted that these procedures were, to a great extent, adhered to.

Counting process

The Electoral Code prescribes that votes cast must be counted at each polling station.⁶⁶

We observed that the close and count was carried out in public and was methodical. In several instances, though, members of our Group were asked to observe the counting process from outside the polling station through the window. This is contrary to the Electoral Code, which provides that observers can witness the counting and tabulation processes inside polling stations.

We also note that, with counting barely having commenced, official projections had already been announced on voter turnout and participation rates. We caution against the communication of statistics before final verification as this could potentially undermine trust in the process.

Overall, the counting process as prescribed was followed.

⁶⁵ Article 151 of the Electoral Code.

⁶⁶ Article 14 of the Electoral Code.



Sealed ballot box ahead of count

Recommendation

- Enhanced training on provisions of the Electoral Code relating to observation of the counting process should be provided to polling staff, to ensure consistency in application.

Tabulation, collation and dissemination of election results

The Electoral Code provides that, after each presidential election, the Minister must send a report to the President of the Republic, the Presidents of the two Chambers of Parliament, the President of the Constitutional Court, the President of the Court of Auditors and the President of the Council of State. The Minister must transmit such a report within 60 days from the date of the proclamation of the results by the Constitutional Court.⁶⁷ At the time of concluding this report, the 60-day period had not yet been concluded.

To address the procedural deficiencies observed in the tabulation, collation and dissemination of electoral results, a number of recommendations are proposed.

Recommendations

- Electoral management officials and institutions should rigorously observe legally prescribed timelines for consolidating and announcing results. Well-defined procedures should be implemented to eliminate unwarranted delays, while contingency plans must be prepared to mitigate logistical or technical challenges. Any such measures must ensure they uphold the highest standards of transparency and public trust.
- Provisional results should be made available to the public in real time via secure digital platforms, enabling stakeholders to monitor the tabulation process at every stage. Additionally, comprehensive breakdowns by polling unit, along with promptly published scanned copies of result sheets, should be provided to support independent verification and ensure accountability.

67 Article 29 of the Electoral Code.

- A standardised framework for disseminating results should be established, facilitating consistent and legally sound public communications. All official announcements should be distributed through authorised and verified channels, with regular updates provided to uphold transparency and sustain stakeholder trust.
- Accredited independent observers should conduct post-election audits to examine the tabulation process, with their findings promptly disclosed to the public. Additionally, electoral authorities should consider implementing effective grievance redress mechanisms to resolve any disputes stemming from delays or irregularities in the transmission of results.
- Capacity-building initiatives for officials tasked with result collation should be strengthened. This entails implementing comprehensive training programmes designed to improve operational efficiency, ensure precision and deepen understanding of transparency protocols. Additionally, integrating technological solutions can significantly reduce manual errors and streamline procedures, fostering greater confidence in electoral outcomes.
- Institutionalise regular briefings for political parties, civil society representatives, and the media throughout the tabulation process, enabling timely oversight and fostering trust.
- Public awareness initiatives that educate citizens on electoral procedures can further strengthen accountability and reinforce the integrity of the process.

Table 2: Voter turnout in the 2025 presidential elections in Gabon

Province	No. of registered voters	No. of voters who voted	Percentage voter turnout
Estuaire	366,563	235,964	64.37%
Haut-Ogooué	103,388	90,246	87.29%
Moyen-Ogooué	43,845	29,739	67.83%
Ngounié	80,304	53,624	66.78%
Nyanga	36,785	27,580	74.98%
Ogooué-Ivindo	43,053	29,816	69.25%
Ogooué-Lolo	38,401	28,741	74.84%
Ogooué-Maritime	88,645	47,239	53.29%
Woleu-Ntem	87,533	81,674	93.31%
Totals in Gabon	888,517	624,623	70.30%
Diaspora	28,148	19,009	65.98%
Final Results as Announced by Minister of Interior	916,665	643,632	70.21%
Final Results as Announced by Constitutional Court	916,625	642,632	70.11%

Source: Adapted from information released by Minister of Interior and Constitutional Court and verified with International IDEA in Gabon on 23 August 2025.

Post-election dispute resolution

The Group considers the eight-day dispute resolution period mandated by the Constitutional Court as insufficient to ensure a thorough and equitable adjudication of electoral grievances. Given the complexity and gravity of election disputes – which often involve extensive evidence, legal arguments and high stakes for democratic legitimacy – such a constrained timeframe risks compromising due process. Litigants may struggle to gather necessary documentation; legal representatives may face undue pressure in preparing robust submissions and the Court itself may be forced to render decisions without adequate deliberation. This would not only enhance the fairness and credibility of the process, but also allow for more comprehensive scrutiny of contested results, thereby reinforcing public trust in the judiciary's role in safeguarding electoral integrity.

Recommendation

- A lengthier period for dispute resolution by the courts should be considered, as this extended timeframe would align with international good practice, which emphasises the importance of allowing sufficient opportunity for meaningful judicial review in democratic elections.

Voter turnout and candidate support

When the final results were announced by the Constitutional Court on 18 April 2025, the Court indicated that there were 916,635 registered voters, and 642,632 of these voted in the 2025 presidential elections. This translates into voter turnout of 70.11 per cent. The breakdown of these votes as issued by the Minister of Interior and the Constitutional Court is provided in Figure 6. The figures issued by the Minister and the Constitutional Court vary slightly; some are corrections and others may be attributed to rounding-off.

- Voter turnout as published by the Constitutional Court, which is the final authority on the election results, is 70.11 per cent.
- Voter turnout varied from 53.29 per cent (the lowest, in Ogooué-Maritime province) to 93.31 per cent (the highest, in Woleu-Ntem province).
- The diaspora voter turnout is 63.98 per cent.

Table 3: Percentage voter support by candidate¹

Name of presidential candidate	Share of support obtained
Alain-Claude Bilie By Nzé	3.11%
Alain Simplicie Boungoueres	0.37%
Joseph Lapensée Essingone	0.60%
Zenaba Gninga Chaning	0.39%
Axel Stophène Ibinga Ibinga	0.22%
Stéphane Iloko Boussengui	0.36%
Thierry Yvon Michel Ngoma	0.10%
Brice Oligui Nguema	94.85%
Total	100%

Source: Adapted from results announced by the Constitutional Court

¹ Adapted from the results announced by the Constitutional Court.

Annex I. Biographies of Chairperson and Observers

Chairman

H.E. Danny Faure (Seychelles). Mr Faure was elected the fourth President of Seychelles on 16 October 2016. He was Head of Government and held the ministerial portfolios of Defence, Public Administration and Legal Affairs. In addition, in February 2020, at the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic, he also held the portfolio of Health.

As a young man, Mr Faure worked with the Seychelles People's Progressive Front. He became Chair of its Youth Wing and was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the Party. He was appointed Leader of Government Business of the majority party in the National Assembly, a post he served for five years from 1993 to 1998. He was appointed Minister of Education on 28 March 1998. He was instrumental in putting forward the idea of a virtual university for small states of the Commonwealth in the Ministers of Education Forum and the Commonwealth Meeting held in Halifax, Canada. In June 2009, Mr Faure was appointed Secretary-General of the Party.

In 2010, Mr Faure was appointed Vice-President of Seychelles, holding ministerial portfolios for Finance and Trade, Public Administration, and Information and Communication Technology. He also served on the Board of the Commonwealth of Learning from 2014 to 2016; one of his initiatives was to support on Blue Economy for Small Island States.

Mr Faure is presently the Patron and Chairperson of the Danny Faure Foundation, which was launched on 8 June 2021. He is also a member of The Eminent and Distinguished Persons Advisory Panel of the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank.

Lisa LaFlamme (Canada) has been at the forefront of Canadian journalism for over 35 years tackling some of the biggest issues of our time from war zones and natural disasters to the changing political climate around the world.

An Officer of the Order of Canada and Order of Ontario, LaFlamme is the recipient of 14 Canadian Screen Awards, including the Gordon Sinclair Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism, consecutive RTDNA awards as well as a Lifetime Achievement Award for journalism.

The internationally respected journalist was the first woman to anchor CTV National News, a role she held – as chief news anchor and senior editor – for over a decade.

A passionate advocate of democracy, LaFlamme is an ambassador for Journalists For Human Rights, Plan Internationaler Canada, volunteers for Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan and is a member of the board of Samara Centre for Democracy.

Ambassador Francine Baron (Dominica) was born in the Commonwealth of Dominica and is a lawyer by profession. She has extensive experience in private practice and in the diplomatic and political arena. She served as the Attorney General of Dominica from 2007 to 2010. Ms. Baron also served in the diplomatic service as High Commissioner of Dominica to the Court of St James in London and as Permanent Representative and Ambassador of Dominica to the World Trade Organization and to the United Nations Office in Geneva. From 2014 to 2019 she served as the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs and as a Senator in the House of Assembly.

From 2020 to 2023 Ambassador Baron was the Chief Executive Officer of the Climate Resilience Execution Agency of Dominica, a government statutory agency tasked with spearheading Dominica's resilience agenda, which included leading and coordinating strategic initiatives, pursuing the sustainable use of its natural resources and ensuring that resilience is mainstreamed across all sectors.

Ambassador Baron is currently engaged in private practice and serves as Ambassador-at-Large for Dominica.

Joshua Opey (Ghana) is an accomplished youth advocate from Ghana, recognised for his dedication to empowering youth and sustainable development.

He is the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), the official Youth organisation of the Commonwealth representing over 1.5 billion young people in the Commonwealth.

Joshua is a Youth Foresight Fellow with UNICEF and a member of Generation Unlimited's Global Young People Action Team, contributing to UNICEF's global youth engagement strategy.

In addition, he is one of only 15 external members on the UNOPS Youth Engagement platform created by the Executive Director of UNOPS, contributing to the organisation's work towards attaining the SDGs.

Joshua is the Founding Executive Director of the ABAN Center for Global Policy, a youth-led policy think tank providing representation for young Africans in policy-making.

Evans Ogada (Kenya) is a distinguished legal professional specialising in constitutional and administrative law litigation in Kenya. With extensive experience in high-profile cases, having represented the Law Society of Kenya, among others, in pivotal cases, including judicial appointments (2019). He was also involved in the BBI case (David Ndii v AG 2021), the Haiti Police Deployment case, and the Finance Act 2023 challenge. He has also dealt with cases before the East Africa Court of Justice.

He is also a consultant in international and constitutional law, holding key roles in legal bodies, including the Law Society of Kenya's Public Interest Committee and chairing the East Africa Law Society's Rule of Law Committee. He also worked with the Katiba Institute, a leading public interest litigation organisation, and currently teaches Public International Law, Human Rights, and Jurisprudence at the University of Nairobi.

His academic credentials include an LL.M in Public International Law (U.o.N) and a Diplome de Langue from Alliance Francaises. Evans has published extensively on constitutional law, human rights, and judicial integrity and accountability, and also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Platform for Law, Justice and Society*, Kenya's leading socio-legal publication. He has also trained judges, lawyers, civil society

groups, and civil servants on international law, election law, and refugee law, and presented papers at in many conferences on judicial independence, access to justice, human rights among other legal topics.

Gaudence Mushimiyimana (Rwanda) has been a disability rights activist for 22 years and the Co-Founding Executive Director of the Rwandan Organization of Women with Disabilities (UNABU), leading efforts to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights for women with disabilities. She has played many roles within the disability movement in Rwanda and Africa; first as the National coordinator of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2007-2009); then as the deputy legal representative of the Umbrella of Organizations of People with Disabilities in the Fight against HIV and AIDS (2006-2008) and also as the Secretary-General of National Union of Disabilities Organizations (2010-2016). Since 2019, she has served on the executive committee of the Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum, first as the regional women's representative, and now as Chair of the Commonwealth Disabled Women's forum. In 2020, she was recognised as a Woman of Courage by the US Ambassador to Rwanda for promoting inclusion and US Embassy IVLP Alumni.

Mr Mosotho Simon Moepya (South Africa) is a member of the Electoral Commission of South Africa (the Commission). He was appointed to this position in November 2018, for a term of 7 years. Mosotho has been associated with election management since 1998, when he joined the Commission and successfully held various positions, including positions of: Director for Electoral Logistics, Senior Manager: Electoral Logistics, Planning and Infrastructure, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer and Chief Electoral Officer. At the end of his term as Chief Electoral Officer, Mosotho sought to pursue other interests and therefore, did not seek a renewal of his mandate as Chief Electoral Officer for South Africa.

Prior to his appointment as a Member of the Commission, Mosotho completed several continental consulting assignments in the management of elections, democratic governance, peacebuilding and electoral conflict resolution. These assignments included work completed with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries.

Mosotho has covered various election-related assignments in diverse jurisdictions, including: Australia, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, the Comoros, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sudan, Tanzania, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe.

Before his involvement with elections, Mosotho held positions in the fast-moving consumer goods, third party logistics, and information technology industries where he worked for Unilever South Africa (Pty) Limited, Transnet Freight Rail, Barloworld Limited and the Bidvest Group. Mosotho holds a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) degree, as well as other commercial degrees.

Amantha Perera (Sri Lanka) is a researcher and an academic focusing on journalism and technology facilitated threats and developing safe and professional digitised workspace for journalists. He is a Director at the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma Asia Pacific. He is currently pursuing a PhD at Creative, University of South Australia. He is one of the leading experts in the Asia Pacific Region specialising in developing skills for journalists to work safely and professionally in digitally enhanced workspace. His works of journalism have appeared in TIME, the Guardian, Reuters, the Washington Post and al-Jazeera among others.

Staff Team:

Linford Andrews
 Adviser & Head (Staff Team Leader)
 Electoral Support Section
 Governance & Peace Directorate

Abiola Sunmonu
 Adviser & Head
 Political Africa Section
 Governance & Peace Directorate

Justin Pettit
 Adviser & Acting Head
 Human Rights Unit
 Governance & Peace Directorate

Musu Kaikai
 Political Officer
 Political Africa Section
 Governance & Peace Directorate

Temitope Kalejaiye
 Public Relations and Engagement Officer
 Governance and Peace Directorate

Madonna Lynch
 Executive Officer
 Electoral Support Section
 Governance & Peace Directorate

Penina Shipley
 Administrative Assistant
 Commonwealth Small States Office, Geneva

Fredrick Sigalla
 ICT Systems Specialist
 Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships & Digital Division

Annex II. Arrival Statement

2025 Gabon Presidential Election

**Arrival Statement by H.E. Danny Faure,
former President of Seychelles
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

07 April Libreville, Gabon

Gabon's presidential election being held on 12 April 2025 will mark a significant milestone in the country's transition to inclusive democracy and will shape the course of governance in the country.

On 27 March, five candidates contesting the presidential election signed a Voluntary Code of Conduct. Their pledge to uphold principles of peace, integrity, and respect for democratic institutions during the electoral period, facilitated by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), is commendable.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Gabonese authorities in organising this election and undertaking other initiatives, such as the national inclusive dialogue, as part of a series of programmes aimed at strengthening the country's commitment towards participatory democracy. The November 2024 referendum, in which citizens overwhelmingly voted for a new constitution, marked another significant milestone in Gabon's democracy, which the Commonwealth was present to witness.

A Commonwealth Expert Team (CET) was deployed to Gabon to observe the Constitutional Referendum. The team noted both the positive outcomes from the referendum and highlighted recommended areas for improvement. The referendum also marked our first observation process since Gabon joined the Commonwealth family in 2022 and forms part of the Commonwealth's larger commitment to walk with Gabon as it continues through its transition journey.

The Commonwealth is here to reaffirm its solidarity with Gabon and re-assure its people of its support.

I therefore, consider it a great honour and privilege to have been asked to lead the Commonwealth Observer Group to Gabon's 2025 Presidential Election.

I am grateful to be joined by seven other experts selected from across the Commonwealth. They bring together a diversity of experience, in the fields of electoral management, law, civil society, politics, human rights, and the media, amongst others.

In keeping with the Commonwealth methodology on election observation, this Group was deployed by the Secretary-General, following an invitation from the Government of Gabon.

The Group has now assembled in Libreville and will commence their stakeholder briefings.

We will be meeting numerous stakeholders, including, political parties, the police, civil society groups, citizen observer groups, the media, domestic and regional observers and the diplomatic corps.

Our group of experienced election observers will be assessing the electoral process against international standards and Commonwealth values.

Our mandate, as set out in the Commonwealth's 'Revised Guidelines' for election observation, is to observe and evaluate the pre-election environment, polling day activities and the post-election period. We will consider whether conditions exist for a credible, transparent, and inclusive election, including whether there is a level playing field for candidates; whether public media has been impartial; whether the administration of the electoral process has been transparent; and whether the rule of law has been adhered to.

Our Group has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to make recommendations accordingly.

From 10 April, we will deploy our observers in small teams to different parts of the country to observe electoral preparations and meet with local stakeholders in their respective locations.

On election day, which is 12 April, our Group will observe the opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management processes.

Following the election, our Group will issue a preliminary statement on 14 April. The statement will assess whether the election was conducted in accordance with the standards to which Gabon has committed itself and consider whether the administration of the election aligns with international good practice.

After that, the Group will compile a first draft of its final report which will be prepared in-country, with the report submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General Hon. Shirley Botchwey. It will then be shared with the Government of Gabon, relevant stakeholders and the public.

As we observe the electoral process, we encourage all stakeholders to work together to promote peaceful, credible, and inclusive election for the people of Gabon.

Thank you.

Annex III. Deployment Plan

Commonwealth Observer Group

Gabon General Elections

12 April 2025

Deployment Plan

REGIONS	OBSERVERS
LIBREVILLE	HE Mr Danny Faure Linford Andrews Temi Kalejaiye
LIBREVILLE-Kango	Abiola Sunmonu Madonna Lynch Penina Shipley
LIBREVILLE-Akanda	Gaudence Mushimiyimana Fredrick Sigalla
PORT-GENTIL	Francine Baron Joshua Opey
LAMBARENE	Evans Ogada Lisa LaFlamme
MOUILA	Amantha Perera Musu Kaikai
OYEM	Mosotho Moepya Justin Pettit

Annex IV. Interim Statement

Interim Statement

Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

His Excellency Danny Faure

Former President Of Seychelles

Libreville, Gabon 14 April 2025

Introduction

1. Ladies and gentlemen, I extend a warm welcome to you, the people of Gabon, members of the diplomatic corps, the media and fellow observers.
2. Thank you for coming to this Press Conference, I will present the interim observations of the Commonwealth Observer Group on the electoral process. The final report, setting out our full findings on the entire process and our recommendations, will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.
3. Ladies and Gentlemen, our Group was constituted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, with expertise in election management, legal, media, youth and inclusion from various regions of the Commonwealth. We have been in Gabon since 4 April and will depart on 18 April 2025. Members of the Group have been appointed in our individual capacities, and our role is to offer an independent, informed and impartial analysis of the electoral process, taking account of all factors which may impinge on the overall credibility and transparency of an election. We are independent of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the views contained in this statement and final report are ours.
4. The Commonwealth is honoured to be represented here through this Observer Group, noting that this election is a significant milestone for Gabon. The November 2024 referendum, in which citizens overwhelmingly voted for a new constitution, marked another significant milestone in Gabon's democracy, which the Commonwealth was present to witness. The referendum also marked our first observation process since Gabon joined the Commonwealth family in 2022 and forms part of the Commonwealth's larger commitment to walk with Gabon as it continues through its transition journey.
5. I wish to reaffirm the Commonwealth's steadfast commitment and solidarity with Gabon and re-assure its people of our continued support.
6. We acknowledge the efforts of the Gabonese authorities in organising this election and undertaking other initiatives, such as the national inclusive dialogue, as part of a series of programmes aimed at strengthening the country's commitment towards an inclusive and participatory democracy.
7. We also note that this election marks a series of electoral firsts for Gabon – this includes the change of candidacy requirements as it relates to Gabonese citizenship, to members of the military being permitted to stand for office, and the presidential term extended from five to seven years.

8. We deployed our observers on 10 April 2025 to various locations around Gabon, including Estuaire (Libreville, Akanda, Kango), Moyen-Ogooué (Lambaréné), Ngounié (Mouila), Woleu-Ntem (Oyem), Ogooué-Maritime (Port-Gentil).
9. Prior to our deployment, we met with the Ministers of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Justice, as well as the President and members of the Constitutional Court, the National Commission on Human Rights, Haute Autorité de la communication (HAC), the diplomatic community, the UN, and representatives of a diverse range of civil society, representing women, youth, persons with disabilities, and media practitioners, to gain an understanding of the pre-election environment and preparations for this election. We also established working relationships and exchanged information with other international observers and citizen observer groups. This was to provide our group with a holistic and broad perspective of the electoral process.
10. I now have the privilege to present our preliminary findings which are based on our stakeholder engagements, assessment of the pre-election environment, and observations on election day, including the count.

Pre-election Environment

11. I would like to begin by highlighting a number of positive aspects of the environment in the lead up to these elections.
12. I commend the Ministry of Interior, and in particular, the National Commission for the Organization and Coordination of Elections and the Referendum, for successfully organising this election, in line with the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group's mandate to hold credible elections within a maximum of two years from 30 August 2023.
13. The generally peaceful atmosphere that has prevailed over the election period is laudable. The signing of a Voluntary Code of Conduct by most presidential candidates, with pledges to uphold the principles of peace, integrity, and respect for democratic institutions during the electoral period, facilitated by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), is noted. The Commonwealth commends such initiatives which promote peaceful elections and would encourage that it be upheld in both letter and spirit.

Constitutional and electoral framework

14. While the electoral framework largely provides for competitive democratic elections, it is noted that the new legal framework for these elections was enacted very close to the election date.
15. We nevertheless note and commend efforts at taking forward reforms, which include the enactment of the Electoral Code in January 2025; and the adoption and reintroduction of measures such as the creation of the Election and Referendum Control Authority (ACER) to enhance the conformity of the electoral process with the Electoral Code.
16. Our role as Observers is also to look at areas where we might be able to provide recommendations. In particular one of the aspects that we are still assessing is whether Gabonese citizens have been sufficiently sensitised through

awareness campaigns of the provisions of both the Constitution and the Electoral Code, including voting procedures. We will reflect further on this and provide an assessment in our Final Report.

Election administration

17. Prior to election day, the Ministry of Interior had provided assurances of its preparedness and readiness to conduct the election as scheduled, including the recruitment and training of polling staff, distribution of materials and other logistics. We noted that the National Commission for the Organization and Coordination of Elections and the Referendum was established to conduct the elections.
18. We note that the compressed timelines between the change of the legislative framework governing elections which include the adoption of the new Constitution, the enactment of the Electoral Code, and the date set for elections, were too short and were outside the internationally recommended good practice of six months.
19. On the eve of election day, we noted that preparations for the elections were largely on track.
20. The short campaign period made the distribution of voter ID cards a challenge, necessitating the distribution at polling centres on election day. However, voters without official voter ID cards could still vote provided their names were on the voters list at that polling centre and that they were able to present either a passport or their national ID card.

Civic participation

21. We note that there have been ongoing and fairly commendable efforts to strengthen civic participation in Gabon, as it relates to the electoral process, and there has been capacity building support from various international partners, particularly the UNDP.
22. We note that updated voters' lists were prominently displayed at most, but not all, polling centres, allowing voters to verify their registration details.
23. The Group recommends that measures be considered to promote greater civic participation in the electoral process, by allowing longer periods for sensitisation and awareness raising in respect to the Constitution and legal framework.

The campaign

24. The Group was able to observe some campaign rallies, including that of Ms Gninga Chaning Zenaba, the only female candidate contesting this election. They were robust, and were organised in an overall peaceful and non-disruptive manner.
25. We commend all citizens of Gabon for ensuring a peaceful campaign. Though there were eight presidential candidates, the relatively higher visibility of one candidate in comparison to the others was noted by the Group.
26. It was also noted, that unlike previous elections, the campaign period was shorter and that would have impacted candidates' ability to visit all regions and to effectively campaign.

Media

27. The Group notes that the media landscape in Gabon has evolved over the past year, with media stakeholders experiencing reduced state interference in editorial content. This has led to the increase of the diverse perspective of online media outlets. However, traditional media, such as radio, television, newspapers, remained skewed in favour of the incumbent, which dominated airtime and prime-time coverage.
28. We acknowledge the existing regulations that provide for equal airtime for all candidates. We recommend the strict enforcement of these rules to guarantee fair access to broadcast media and to maintain a level playing field for all candidates
29. The Group commends the fact that there were no internet or media blackouts as has happened in previous elections.

Electoral dispute resolution

30. The Group established that there were no pending matters in the courts that would impede the conduct of these elections. For this, we commend the courts.
31. We note that the Constitutional Court (CC) is authorised to deal with electoral disputes.

Election Day

Pre-poll procedures and opening

32. Poll openings were peaceful and most opened within 45 minutes of the required time frame though there were isolated cases of longer delays. Our teams found that, in a number of polling centres, delays were attributed to incomplete pre-poll procedures, including the authentication of ballot papers by polling station staff.

Conduct of voting

33. While polling procedures were largely followed, with many polling staff carrying out their duties with diligence, there were variations in procedures at some polling stations. There were also some cases of voters not understanding some procedural steps. For example, some voters did not seal their ballot envelopes properly after voting or pulling apart the perforated edges of the ballot.
34. In the polling stations where the Group observed, we noted that voters with prescribed IDs were allowed to vote.

Queue management and priority voting

35. We observed that queues at polling centres were orderly, though there were considerable variations on how voters were accorded priority. We noted that voters with disabilities were generally accorded priority.

Participation and inclusion

36. The Group noted that there was largely gender balance among polling staff. However, our group noted that, there was an under representation of Persons with Disabilities in the locations they observed.

37. There is limited or no disaggregated data on the inclusion of women, youth and person with disabilities in the electoral process and this would be recommended for future endeavours.
38. The Gabonese authorities deserve commendation for their progressive decision to allow prisoners on remand to exercise their right to vote. This move demonstrates commitment to democratic principles and inclusivity, ensuring that even incarcerated individuals retain the fundamentals of civic participation.

Presence and representation at polling station

39. Representatives of presidential candidates were not found at all polling stations and, in the cases where they were present, they were found predominantly to be representing the incumbent. Overall, polling staff were diligent in the conduct of their duties. We noted, and commend, the increased numbers of citizen observers deployed for this election. We also noted the robust representation of ACER in all of the polling stations visited.

Security presence

40. The Group noted a significant security presence at polling stations and in our final report we will speak further on this. We acknowledge the role played by various law enforcement agencies in securing the polling centres and maintaining law and order.

Citizen and international observers:

41. Both citizen and various other international observers were seen at several polling centres. We would like to express our gratitude to all international and citizen observer groups we met both prior to and on Election Day for the cooperation and exchange of views on the unfolding process. The Group however notes with concern, the inconsistent and varied levels of access and treatment by law enforcement and electoral officials.

Secrecy of the ballot

42. The setup of polling booths, or improvised temporary structures, largely assured the secrecy of the ballot.

Situation rooms

43. As Chairperson, I visited the situation rooms operated by various civil society organisations monitoring various aspects of the election. These initiatives should continue to be encouraged, as they enhance transparency and provide a national perspective on key data emerging from the electoral process, especially on election day. This enhances confidence in the electoral process.

Close and count

44. It was observed that those who were in the queue at the 6pm close of polls were allowed to vote. There were other instances where the polls closed late for various reasons including late openings.

45. The close and count was done in public and was methodical. We experienced several instances where members of the Group were asked to observe the counting process from outside the polling stations through windows. This is contrary to the Electoral Code, which provides that observers are allowed to witness the counting and tabulation processes inside polling stations.
46. The group also notes that while counting had barely commenced, there were already official projections in place of voter turnout and participation rates. The group cautions on the communication of statistics before final verification as this could potentially undermine trust in the process.

Conclusions and Post-election Period

47. I commend the people of Gabon for the largely peaceful, calm and orderly manner in which they cast their vote on 12 April 2025.
 48. The people of Gabon have once again demonstrated patience and commitment to their democracy.
 49. We appeal to them to maintain the same commitment in the post-election period, which would be crucial, when Gabon prepares to return to the polls for the legislative and municipal elections.
 50. We do acknowledge that there were challenges and in our final report, we will be making specific recommendations. This will include the need for enhanced training and clearer guidelines for polling staff and the more effective management of the electoral process within polling centres.
 51. It is the view of the Commonwealth Observer Group that this election appeared largely transparent, was peaceful, and conducted in accordance with the established legislative framework of Gabon, and that citizens were able to freely exercise their franchise.
 52. We congratulate and commend the people of Gabon for exercising their right to vote and reaffirming their faith in the principles of democracy.
 53. On behalf of this Group, I would like to encourage the candidates and their supporters to exercise patience and restraint, and to show magnanimity as the results phase is being concluded.
 54. We would encourage that a post-election review be conducted and consider the establishment of an appropriate home-grown mechanism to review all recommendations proposed by both citizen and international observer missions. We would encourage the Commonwealth Secretariat, other international partners to remain ready to provide any support deemed necessary, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders in Gabon.
 55. We will continue to follow the process and our Final Report containing our conclusions and recommendations will be made public in a few weeks.
 56. We trust that our work will contribute to the strengthening of democracy, good governance and the rule of law in Gabon.
 57. It was a special honour for my team and I to be in Gabon at this historical and pivotal time. We thank you for your warmth and hospitality.
 58. I thank you.
- Ends.

Commonwealth Secretariat

Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

thecommonwealth.org



The Commonwealth