

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Gabon Monthly Briefing June 2025

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#### Gabon Summary 24 June 2025

*International Court of Justice (ICJ) rules on 19 May that three islands off the coast of Gabon legally belong to Equatorial Guinea, ending a dispute that started in 1972. The ruling will open negotiations between the two neighbours and is an opportunity for President Brice Oligui Nguema (2025-present) to showcase his diplomacy. The World Bank approves \$150m in financing for *Projet d'aménagement et de développement des Infrastructures du Gabon (PADIG)* (Gabon urban development project) that aims to improve Gabon's urban infrastructure, strengthen public facilities and reduce flood risks in secondary cities. Nguema issues a ban on the export of raw manganese, effective 1 January 2029, as Gabon seeks to focus on local processing of the mineral.*

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#### ICJ rules in favour of Equatorial Guinea over island dispute

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** ruled on 19 May that **Mbanié, Conga** and **Cocoteros** islands off the coast of Gabon legally belong to **Equatorial Guinea**, settling a dispute that goes back to 1972.

In the early 2000s, interest in oil prospects near the island prompted claims from both sides. Equatorial Guinea believed it had a claim to the island because of the **Treaty of Paris (1900)**, which divided French and **Spanish** colonial assets in **West Africa**, and asserted that the islands fell to it as a former Spanish colony. Gabon claimed the judgement should be based on the **Bata Convention**, signed in 1974.<sup>1</sup> However, Equatorial Guinea claimed the document on which Gabon relied was unsigned and not original.<sup>2</sup> During the court case, attended by Gabon's constitutional court honorary president **Marie-Madeline Mborantsuo**, it was revealed that the original documents for the Bata Convention had not been located as Gabon's archives were not correctly managed.<sup>3</sup> The document presented to the court was an unauthenticated photocopy of a photocopy. Ultimately, the ICJ agreed with Equatorial Guinea and ruled that the Bata Convention cannot be considered a legal treaty.

Gabon has had soldiers stationed on the largest of the islands, Mbanié, who will now have to leave. Presidency spokesperson **Guy Rossatanga-Rignault** stated after the ruling that Gabon and Equatorial Guinea will have to enter negotiations, as the Paris Convention could have an impact on the land border between the two countries:

*"Gabon and Equatorial Guinea have to live side-by-side, we can't move away from each other. Therefore, we will have to talk it over to solve all these problems."<sup>4</sup>*

This is especially true as the ruling to abide by the Treaty of Paris gives Gabon sovereignty over specific areas that were previously under Equatorial Guinea's control, including regions near **Ebebiyin** and **Mongomo**. The negotiations will be a test for President **Brice Oligui Nguema** (2025-present) and will showcase his diplomatic approach. To this point, Nguema arrived in Equatorial Guinea on 4 June, two days ahead of the **Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)** summit which Equatorial Guinea hosted, to meet with his counterpart, **Teodoro Obiang Nguema** (1979-present).<sup>5</sup> The two leaders agreed to establish a joint committee to review the ICJ's decision

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<sup>1</sup> Reuters, 30 Sep 2024

<sup>2</sup> Reuters, 30 Sep 2024

<sup>3</sup> DW, 19 May 2025

<sup>4</sup> BBC, 19 May 2025

<sup>5</sup> RFI, 6 Jun 2025

and resolve any lingering issues. They also signed several bilateral agreements in the areas of security, diplomacy and agriculture, highlighting Nguema's amicable approach.

Both countries are oil producers and are seeking new resources to tap into. Gabon's oil production is expected to fall by 2.1% in 2025, and by 2026, oil revenues are expected to drop by 35%.<sup>6</sup> New oil wells would help the country to continue to bring in revenue from its most established sector while it continues diversifying its economy.

### World Bank approves infrastructure financing

The **World Bank** announced 11 June it had approved \$150m in financing for **Projet d'aménagement et de développement des Infrastructures du Gabon (PADIG)** (Gabon urban development project) that aims to improve Gabon's urban infrastructure, strengthen public facilities and reduce flood risks in secondary cities.<sup>7</sup>

The project will focus on the cities of **Oyem, Lambaréné, Koulamoutou, Franceville, Mouila, Lebamba** and **Ndendé**.<sup>8</sup> PADIG is focused on two areas – investing in climate-resilient infrastructure such as roads, schools and green spaces as well as flood risk reduction infrastructure to protect this urban infrastructure. Under the project, technical support will also be provided to help improve institutional capacity for better urban development, planning and management.<sup>9</sup>

World Bank division director for Gabon, **Cheick F. Kante**, noted that over 90% of Gabon's population lives in cities but that high levels of urbanisation have not led to economic transformation, meaning that secondary cities are behind in the level of infrastructure offered.<sup>10</sup> While a positive development, it has highlighted Gabon's limited ability to carry out these projects, which are key for economic growth and job creation, without the assistance of external funding.

### Nguema bans the export of raw manganese from 2029

Nguema issued a directive in a council of ministers meeting banning the export of raw manganese, effective 1 January 2029, as Gabon seeks to focus on local processing of the mineral. Per the government statement released after the meeting on 30 May, the intention is to develop an industrial policy that focuses on local processing of raw materials, upskilling the local workforce, controlling technological value chains and increasing tax revenues.<sup>11</sup> The 2029 date was chosen to allow miners time to adapt to this directive and, according to Nguema, make the necessary investments. Less than 20% of manganese mined in Gabon is currently processed locally, indicating the extent to which Gabon stands to benefit from increasing local processing.<sup>12</sup>

Gabon is the world's second largest manganese producer and mined 7.4 million tonnes in 2023. The largest manganese miner in Gabon, **Comilog** – majority-owned by **France**-headquartered **Eramet** – saw its share price drop by 5% when trading commenced on 2 June. However, it released a statement on the same day acknowledging the decision and noting that it aims to safeguard the 10,460 jobs it has created in the country through Comilog's operations, as well as the operations of **Setrag**, Comilog's transport subsidiary.<sup>13</sup> The statement added that Comilog will continue to work with the government "*in a spirit of constructive partnership and mutual respect*".<sup>14</sup> The government is a 28.7% shareholder in Comilog and negotiations will almost certainly be required to understand how the government will contribute, financially or otherwise, to help create local processing units.

<sup>6</sup> Direction Générale de l'Economie et de la Politique Fiscale (general directorate of economy and fiscal policy), 1 Oct 2024

<sup>7</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 16 Jun 2025

<sup>8</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 16 Jun 2025

<sup>9</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 16 Jun 2025

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, 11 Jun 2025

<sup>11</sup> Jeune Afrique, 31 May 2025

<sup>12</sup> Jeune Afrique, 5 Jun 2025

<sup>13</sup> Mining Weekly, 2 Jun 2025

<sup>14</sup> RFI, 2 Jun 2025

Significant investment will also be required to bolster national infrastructure to help facilitate this development, most importantly in the energy sector. Gabon's energy sector has struggled to meet demand for household electricity and most recently, a drop in water levels at the **Kinguélé** and **Tchimbélé** hydroelectric dams, which supply nearly 50% of **Libreville's** electricity, has led to an increase in power outages. The **African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank)** approved 1.3 billion FCFA (\$2.27m) in emergency financing for Gabon in early June to help improve access to electricity.<sup>15</sup>

## Planner

Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) International Monetary Fund (IMF)** mission

27 Sep 2025 **(Gabon)** Parliamentary elections

11 Oct 2025 **(Gabon)** Local elections

Nov 2025 **(Gabon)** Senatorial elections

23 Dec 2025 **(Gabon)** Constitutional court judges sworn in

2026 **(Gabon) Cap Lopez** LNG terminal to start production

## Chronology

22 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) RFI**. President **Brice Oligui Nguema** announces he will launch his own political party on 28 June after running as an independent candidate in the 12 April election;

16 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Le Nouveau Gabon**. Economy ministry reports that **Australia**, the **United Kingdom** and the **Netherlands** became Gabon's top 10 oil customers in the fourth quarter of 2024 due to significant increases in their oil imports;

12 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Le Nouveau Gabon**. Gabon holds two strategic meetings to accelerate its digital transformation through the **eGabon-SIS** and **Gabon Digital** programmes, aligning with President **Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema's** vision for a sovereign, inclusive digital nation;

12 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Le Monde**. Media reveal that a **French** court indicted former president **Ali Bongo Ondimba's** sister, **Pascaline Bongo**, in January in a 2009 corruption and money laundering case in which between \$10m and \$11m may have been laundered through a **Hong Kong** entity;

10 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Jeune Afrique**. Former presidential spokesperson **Ike Nguoni** launches his own political party ahead of the legislative, departmental and local elections, set to take place on 27 September and 11 October 2025;

4 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Direct Infos Gabon**. **Australia's Genmin** signs a non-binding agreement with **United States**-based family office **ID Advisors** for \$3m in financing for its **Baniaka** iron ore project in Gabon;

4 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Direct Infos Gabon**. Gabon decides to unilaterally end its **Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement** with the **European Union (EU)**, citing an unbalanced partnership;

2 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Gabon Review**. Gabon raises 80 billion FCFA (\$139m) on the **Central African Stock Exchange**;

2 Jun 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) RFI**. **France**-headquartered mining and metallurgy company **Eramet** says it has acknowledged the government's decision to ban the export of raw manganese and will engage with officials and safeguarding the 10,460 local jobs it has created;

31 May 2025 **Libreville (Gabon) Direct Infos Gabon**. President **Brice Oligui Nguema** announces a ban on the export of raw manganese as of 1 January 2029;

<sup>15</sup> Direct Infos Gabon, 4 Jun 2025

29 May 2025 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. Vice president **Alexandre Barro Chambrier** and **United Kingdom** high commissioner **Simon Day** meet to discuss strengthening bilateral economic and diplomatic relations, including plans to launch a joint **Chamber of Commerce**;

26 May 2025 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. The government announces that the provisional administration of **Société d'Énergie et d'Eau du Gabon (SEEG)** (Gabonese energy and water company) will end on 28 May;

25 May 2025 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. Gabon launches a comprehensive review of its **Nationally Determined Contributions** to reinforce its climate commitments and international leadership;

19 May 2025 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Gabon Review*. **International Court of Justice** rules on the territorial dispute between Gabon and **Equatorial Guinea**, confirming the **1900 Franco-Spanish Convention** as the legitimate basis for defining their land border, granting Gabon sovereignty over specific areas that were previously under Equatorial Guinea's control, including regions near **Ebebiyin** and **Mongomo**;

17 May 2025 **Libreville (Gabon)** *Le Nouveau Gabon*. Public prosecutor **Eddy Minang** clarifies that former first lady **Sylvia Bongo** and her son **Noureddine Bongo** were provisionally released from prison due to health concerns but that the state is still pursuing proceedings against them;

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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