

Adjustment Is Back: The Political and Financial Crisis in Central African Oil-Producing Countries

Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville



François GAULME

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Ifri

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE

Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: accueil@ifri.org

Website: ifri.org

Author

François Gaulme, an anthropologist and historian by training, is a Research Fellow at Ifri's Sub-Saharan Africa Centre. A former Editor of the weekly *Marches tropicales* and the quarterly *Afrique contemporaine*, he lectured on Africa at the Institut d'études politiques, at the Catholic University of Paris and at the Saint-Cyr National Military Academy at Coëtquidan. He recently retired from service at the French Development Agency (AFD) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His publications include *Le Gabon et son ombre [Gabon and its Shadow]* (Paris: Karthala, 1988), several collective books on Africa and many anthropological or international relations papers.

Abstract

This paper aims to highlight both the financial, economic and political adjustment cycle, affecting two Central African petro-states, Gabon and the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). These two countries, linked by their rentier economic system and their common colonial history, have nevertheless experienced different political fates after independence, with the former maintaining a special relationship with France, while the latter quickly opted for Marxism. In the 1980s and 1990s, they were both subjected to structural adjustment, initially economic and financial, and then political, after the collapse of the USSR and the dissolution of single-party systems in Africa. Nowadays and since the 2015 oil crisis, they have been subject again to a second adjustment of their public finances under the control of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At the same time, their “hybrid” presidential regimes are challenged from within: the spectre of the civil war in the 1990s still weighs on the public arena in Congo, while the dynastic succession in Gabon has led to a lasting stalemate in the national dialogue. A new cycle of democratization is still only one scenario among others, which is relatively unlikely in the current situation, despite growing social discontent and the economic crisis in both countries.

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Introduction

In the multi-faceted crisis affecting the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC)¹, two member-countries united by history and their common situation as oil producers,² Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon are experiencing specific problems, challenging their rentier economy as well as the presidential system that defines them.

In order to better determine their future prospects, this paper presents a retrospective analysis³ of the development of these two *petro-states*,⁴ by identifying the cyclical nature of the economic, but also political, adjustment to which they have been subjected again.

The collapse of world oil prices in 2015 had an overall impact on CEMAC which entered into recession the following year. The heads of state, who met at an Extraordinary Summit on 23 December 2016 in Yaoundé, then excluded devaluing their common currency, the CFA franc, issued by the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) and guaranteed by France.⁵ They opted for bilateral negotiations with the IMF,⁶ in order to “better structure the adjustment efforts of their States, assist them in resolving the crisis and help them put in place conditions for a virtuous and sustainable recovery of their economies.”⁷

This positioning contained an initial contradiction: while emphasizing the principle of their group solidarity, the CEMAC countries were however engaged in separate negotiations with the IMF. It was the only way forward, as the Fund only lends to its Member States and not to transnational institutions. In actual fact, it was Congo-Brazzaville which encountered the greatest difficulties in engaging effectively with the IMF. On the contrary, Gabon managed to obtain the Fund’s support in June

1. Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Chad.

2. Congo-Brazzaville ranks 6th and Gabon 9th out of African oil producers.

3. Despite the lack of reliable figures in many areas. Critical data processing also includes considering extensive media production of data of variable and often controversial quality, which has developed considerably in recent decades.

4. About this concept, see R. Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.

5. At a fixed exchange rate of 1 € for 656 CFA francs.

6. Whose Managing Director, Christine Lagarde, was present at this summit with the French Minister of Finance Michel Sapin.

7. “Communiqué final du Sommet extraordinaire de la CEMAC”, Compte rendu intégral, Yaoundé, 23 December 2016, available at: www.prc.cm.

2017 for its economic recovery and debt treatment program. At the time of writing this paper, the financial crisis is far from being over, but the increase in oil prices above USD \$ 70 per barrel should automatically improve both countries' revenues.

Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville have many similarities and are intertwined with each other, the latter enveloping the former in the south-east along more than 1,000 km of common border. This border, which has not yet been definitely set, stems from successive divisions within French Equatorial Africa between 1910 and 1960. It does not make any ethnic or territorial sense. At the time of independence, the French geographer, Gilles Sautter, identified to the contrary a logical "Gabon-Congo area" between the Atlantic in the west and the Congo and Ubangi rivers in the east.⁸ However, he acknowledged the "particular nature" of Gabon,⁹ that naturally accentuates the distance between the two capitals.¹⁰ These factors justify a parallel, but different approach to these two countries, starting with Gabon whose state formation is the oldest. This analysis will indeed show that although these two states originating from the same colonial federation now seem to be in an almost similar situation with their presidential system and their dependency on oil, however they were previously able to make very different choices, with Congo-Brazzaville having opted for Marxism at a time when Gabon remained pro-Western and in very close contact with France. Another distinctive feature, the armed violence which characterized the Congolese civil war in the 1990s has so far been spared from Gabonese political life.

8. G. Sautter, *De l'Atlantique au fleuve Congo. Une géographie du sous-peuplement. République du Congo, République gabonaise*, Paris : Mouton, 1966, t. I, p. 11.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Libreville is more than 1,000 km from Brazzaville, but only 700 from Yaoundé in Cameroon.

Gabon: in need of a stimulus

Compared to many sub-Saharan countries, Gabon's post-colonial history is marked by extensive political continuity, the death of President Omar Bongo in 2009, after more than forty years in power, resulted in a smooth dynastic succession. However, the 2016 presidential election, combined with the financial crisis, has challenged the previous equilibrium based on consensual sharing of oil rents.

Before oil

Before oil, Gabon was only a small, under-populated country with wood as the main resource and very dependent in all respects on the former mother country. The estuary which gave the country its name and where the capital, Libreville, is located, was discovered by the Portuguese at the end of the 15th century, but relations with the Europeans only developed in the 19th century. France established a fort and naval base there in 1844, which enabled Catholic missionaries to settle and triumph locally over the American Protestants. This turning point still marks modern Gabonese society, with the early development of female education that promoted the inter-ethnic mixing characteristic of the coastal region.

The forest people who inhabited the country were few, but extremely diverse: over a surface area of 267,000 km², Gabon only had 440,300 inhabitants¹¹ in 1960 (as opposed to nearly 2 million in 2016 according to the World Bank), however grouped into about 40 distinct ethnic groups.

Despite the lack of ethnic data in censuses since 1961, it is common to say that the north-western Fang (also represented in Equatorial Guinea where they control the central government and in south Cameroon) are still the dominant group at 30%, counter-balanced in the south-west by the Echira Punu at 25% and the Mbete in the south-east at 20%.¹² In fact, the respective demographic development of the Gabonese ethno-linguistic groups remains quite unknown and the statistics are acknowledged as being notoriously questionable. Also the number does not always matter: The Myene coastal group (9% in 1960-1961) retains a specific social status

11. According to the first and last French census by INSEE at the time of independence; for demographic, ethnic and linguistic issues, see: F. Gaulme, *Le Gabon et son ombre*, Paris: Karthala, 1988, pp. 33-47.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

because of its historic relationship with Europeans and its traditional inter-ethnic mixing.

Due to the ethnic diversity, no group of people could impose a *lingua franca* on the entire country. For a long time, French has been used, emphasizing the coast's cultural openness. The long-standing missionaries' educational efforts also very largely explains the high level of primary literacy and the use of French among both sexes.

Also, the historical link with France remained very strong at the time of independence. Léon Mba, the first president, unable to obtain departmental status for Gabon, wanted to keep the French flag on the new Gabonese one.¹³ At the start of his presidency, his successor Omar Bongo even granted the title of "Adoptive Gabonese" to French residents. He then made vain efforts to keep the Gabonese education system in the French one.¹⁴ It was only in 2012 that his son, Ali Bongo Ondimba, moved away from this tradition, considering to make English the second official language.

After independence, the relatively negligent attitude of the French government towards Gabon also radically changed: from an orphan colony, the country became a preferred partner because of the presence of strategic ore (uranium) and hydrocarbons. After the 1963 revolution in Congo-Brazzaville (see *below*), the old loyal and sleepy trading post became of major strategic importance in Central Africa. Without hesitation, France suppressed the one and only coup d'état in the country's history in 1964. It based a parachute regiment there and was involved in choosing Léon Mba's successor on his death in 1967.¹⁵

Omar Bongo and the first adjustment

Omar Bongo's¹⁶ very long presidency, from 1967 to 2009, retrospectively gives an impression of stability due to its exceptional length of time. Yet, his accession to power happened in a climate of tension which prevailed in Gabon after the suppression of the 1964 coup d'état. The young military coup leaders enjoyed support from the first generation of higher education graduates educated in France and generally speaking attracted by socialism and the anti-colonial fight.

13. *Ibid.* p. 134

14. In the first two decades of independence, the Gabonese baccalaureate was automatically recognized by France as part of the Central African Federation of Higher Education (FESAC).

15. See in particular, J.-P. Bat, *Le syndrome Foccart. La politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours*, Paris: Gallimard, 2012, p. 259-260.

16. Albert-Bernard Bongo, became El Hadj Omar Bongo after his conversion to Islam in 1974 and then Omar Bongo Odimba in 2003 by adding his father's name.

Showing an exceptional talent for negotiation and compromise which would have been noted when he started as a young civil servant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the 1962 Gabon/Congo-Brazzaville crisis,¹⁷ when the young president came to power, his key objective was to consolidate his government by obtaining long-lasting political coalescence in the new Gabonese elite. Although without elected office before 1967, he immediately demonstrated a verbal closeness with working-class people combined with the dynamism of his image as the continent's youngest head of state.

The economic situation was very favorable to him. Oil production, which started modestly in 1957 (with 177,000 tons), even before independence increased to 1 million tons in 1965 and then 5 million in 1970. It would exceed 11 million in 1975,¹⁸ with the country then entering into an exclusively rentier economic system from which it has not yet emerged.

Under the banner of “renovation”,¹⁹ the founding president of the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) embarked on a policy of major public works in 1968 intended to make Libreville a modern capital and to achieve his major project, the Transgabonais railway (the Transgabonais), which the World Bank refused to finance. This choice, involving the clientelist and politically controlled use of corruption, was very effective in uniting the new co-opted elites according to a very careful geopolitical principle of respect for ethnic balances in an institutional system that Jean-François Médard defined as “neo-patrimonial.”²⁰ However, it was disastrous in terms of economic and financial governance, especially since it also included an industrial strategy of import-substitution and development of a para-statal sector which created jobs, but only found its balance with budgetary funding. In that respect, Gabon had all the characteristics of a petro-state, according to Ricardo Soares de Oliveira's definition: increase in state power controlling both the political, economic and social areas; an initial economic boom phase based on construction, para-statal companies and services.²¹

Faced with the excessive rise in public spending, France only managed to seal an initial breach in the budgetary resources in 1977 after a decline in oil production. But, the Gabonese budget went from some 4 billion CFA

17. Personal information.

18. F. Gaulme, *Le Gabon et son ombre*, op. cit., graph 2, p. 146.

19. About this slogan, see in particular: K. Tinasti, *Le Gabon, entre démocratie et régime autoritaire*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014, p. 68 ssq.

20. About this concept, see J.-F. Médard (dir.), *États d'Afrique*, Paris: Karthala, 1991.

21. R. Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, op. cit., p. 30.

francs on independence to 700 billion in 1986²² and the second financial crisis, the most serious one of 1987, exceeded the possibilities of French support. For the first time, it resulted in a “structural adjustment program” being adopted, overseen by the IMF and the World Bank and setting conditions for the country’s recovery. It imposed a neoliberal strategy on a reluctant government, directly striking at the foundations of a statist political economy, controlled up to then in detail by the presidency of the republic and therefore only applied imperfectly. Gabon, which is a sparsely populated country with a high cost of living, also suffered a strong comparative disadvantage for input costs, compared to Cameroon or to West African countries. However, new oil discoveries on land (the Rabi-Kounga field) helped to take over from the declining *offshore* and restore the country’s economic and financial situation, with crude oil production reaching its historic peak of 18 million tons in 1997.

The partial implementation of financial rigor was also followed, more unexpectedly, by a process that would be described as political adjustment. Because of the strength of relations with France, François Mitterrand’s election in 1981 almost automatically awoke a Gabonese opposition in exile. Locally, after illegal strikes due to austerity, the year 1990 was decisive with a university movement followed by a national conference which re-established a democratic multi-party system and freedom of the press in March-April. In May, violent rioting in Libreville and then the full-scale uprising in Port-Gentil, the wood and oil capital, followed the suspicious death of Joseph Rendjambé, an opponent from that city. The French army re-established peace and probably saved the government.²³

The following years saw a long fight by Omar Bongo to maintain power within the framework of a multi-party system. He stormed ahead²⁴ (for a five-year term and with officially 51% of the votes) in the first competitive election in December 1993, against a Catholic priest, Paul Mba Abessole, a Fang from Estuaire province, like the first president, Léon Mba. The disputed result, just after the devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994, led to new rioting in Libreville and increased strikes. After a repressive phase, negotiations with the opposition grouped together in the High Council of the Resistance (HCR) resulted in the Paris Accords in

22. F. Gaulme, *Le Gabon et son ombre*, *op. cit.*, p. 130; or respectively 80 million and 14 billion “new French francs” of the period.

23. President Bongo being absent from the country, the French army intervened on 24 May 1990 in Port-Gentil to protect French interests, see D. E. Gardinier, *Historical Dictionary of Gabon*, 2nd ed., London: Scarecrow Press, p. 289.

24. K. Tinasti, *Le Gabon, entre démocratie et régime autoritaire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100: massive fraud and anomalies, as the number of votes was 40% higher than voters in Haut-Ogooué. For variations in the timing of the electoral body in Gabon, see H. Fleischhacker, “Gabon”, in: D. Nohlen, B. Thibaut and D. Krennerich (eds.), *Élections in Africa: A Data Handbook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

April. The opposition was incorporated into a hybrid system of “competitive authoritarianism”²⁵ and controlled democratization²⁶ until Omar Bongo’s death. He was re-elected in 1998 (for seven years) without his involvement in the Congo civil war (see below) having had any visible impact on this election, and then again in 2005. This quasi-return to a single-party system was accompanied, despite a still flamboyant presidential lifestyle, by a wiser economic strategy in an oil environment that became very favorable again.

Ali Bongo and the 2016 crisis

After Omar Bongo’s death in June 2009, a few months after that of his Congolese wife, Édith Bongo, a new concept of dynastic continuity was enforced in the Gabonese political system. Ali Bongo Ondimba, the deceased president’s eldest son and Minister of Defense since 1999,²⁷ was in fact elected with 41% of votes in a single vote.

Once again, the result was challenged, again leading to new violence and repression in Libreville and Port-Gentil. However, the electoral campaign also revealed a rallying phenomenon around Ali Bongo in a strategy described locally as “TSF” (“tout sauf un Fang” [anyone except a Fang]) which put his main opponent, André Mba Obame, at a disadvantage. The new president is very different from his father in behavior and educated in France, but also attracted by the English-speaking world and as soon as he was elected, the new president launched a proactive policy marked by a reversal of regional alliances. He put an end to the political-economic rivalry with Cameroon, and moved away from Congo-Brazzaville and closer to Paul Kagame’s Rwanda. Advocating both an economic (to move away from reliance on oil) and diplomatic (to shake off French influence) diversification, he increased new links with Asia (China and India, but also Malaysia and Singapore), while strengthening long-standing relations with Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

All these alliances (especially, very symbolically, with Rwanda) emphasized a gradual distancing from France that had already started during his father’s lifetime, because of the “ill-gotten gains”²⁸ legal

25. S. Levitsky and L. A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

26. For the limits of Gabonese democratisation, see K. Tinasti, *Le Gabon, entre démocratie et régime autoritaire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-188.

27. For this reason, he significantly increased the size of the army and improved the soldiers’ condition.

28. This series of French legal proceedings for misappropriation of public funds, following a complaint by NGOs such as Sherpa and Transparency International and members of the Congolese and Gabonese diaspora, started in 2007 and is still ongoing, involves many properties bought in France by the leaders of Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and their families.

proceedings in Paris involving the families of leaders of Central African oil-producing countries. A new defense agreement, without any secret clause and excluding any domestic intervention, was signed in 2010. The French base for regional deployment in Central Africa was maintained in the Gabonese capital, but with reduced staff (350 personnel instead of more than 600 previously).

Those forces present, renamed as French Units in Gabon (EFG) in 2014, did not intervene during the rioting and then the government crackdown of unprecedented violence,²⁹ which followed in Libreville in late August 2016, on the announcement of Ali Bongo's re-election for a new seven-year term with 48% of the votes; a result which was confirmed by the Constitutional Court.³⁰ The president won with a difference of only 5,000 votes and an abnormally high participation in Haut-Ogooué province, the family stronghold. His opponent, Jean Ping,³¹ a distinguished diplomat, won in the capital and three-quarters of the country.³²

The conduct of this suspect presidential election was severely criticized by foreign observers, particularly the European Union (EU)³³ and the International Organisation of la Francophonie (OIF),³⁴ but this 2016 presidential attempt to force it, which recalled that of 1993, did not have any actual diplomatic consequences.³⁵

The vote took place in an already deteriorating domestic political environment. The OIF's observation report described it as a climate of a "clear breach of trust"³⁶ between the national political actors, in particular noting the controversy about the head of state's nationality, as well as the "rifts" within the PDG itself. Furthermore – and unlike 2009 – growing divisions emerged among Omar Bongo's family and inner circle. These referred to personal disagreements, but also to internal ethnic rivalries in

29. With the helicopter attack on Jean Ping's HQ.

30. Chaired by Marie Madeleine Mborantsuo, from Haut-Ogooué province, often presented as the president's "step-mother" because of her relationship with Omar Bongo. Through her role, she has become a key person in the Gabonese state since 2009.

31. As Gabonese Minister of Foreign Affairs, he chaired the UN General Assembly at the 2005 "World Summit" and was also chair of the African Union (AU) Commission from 2008 to 2012.

32. For details, see the electoral maps published by the Africa in the World (LAM) centre at the Institute for Political Studies at Bordeaux, available at: www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr.

33. *Rapport final, République gabonaise. Élection présidentielle, 27 August 2016*, European Union Election Observation Mission, 2016.

34. Presidential election in Gabon, 27 August 2016. *Rapport de la mission d'information et de contacts de la Francophonie*, Libreville, 22-30 August 2016, Paris: Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, 2017.

35. On 14 September 2017, following the Election Observation Mission's report, the European Parliament in Strasbourg voted on an emergency resolution on Gabon (2017/2830(RSP) calling on the European Council to take targeted sanctions against the Gabonese authorities. The impact was not monitored.

36. See Presidential election in Gabon, 27 August 2016. OIF, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.

Haut-Ogooué: the president is Teke on his father's side as opposed to Obamba on his mother's side, which is the dominant group in this province. Finally, the breach between the "renovators", the modernist trend in the PDG founded by Ali Bongo in 1989, and barons of the regime had been observed for a long time.

Once his re-election was declared, the president broke with an unwritten rule of Gabonese geopolitics by choosing a prime minister outside the Fang group. In regional terms, he was now relying on the country's eastern provinces (Haut-Ogooué, Ogooué-Ivindo and Ogooué-Lolo), the only ones to have mostly voted for him, therefore having a fairly narrow ethnic base, mainly Teke-Obamba and Kota-Benga.³⁷ For his part, Jean Ping had eradicated previous political divisions in 2016 by bringing together a trans-ethnic vote, both Myene, Fang³⁸ and Echira Punu, around his name in the west of the country. Therefore, Gabon was cut in half electorally in 2016 along an unprecedented divide.

In 2018, the political crisis is ongoing. Jean Ping still considers himself as the "president elect" and is recognized as such by the "radical" opposition and the diaspora.³⁹ The country's five Catholic bishops, affirmed in a statement on 4 February 2017, that dialogue was "imperative, unavoidable and essential to get Gabon out of the crisis." However, one year later, although the government elections have been delayed since 2016, the country is moving away from an inclusive reconciliation and the presidential power has in fact been reinforced in two phases: in January 2018, a constitutional review allowed the head of state to stand for re-election indefinitely⁴⁰ and then an electoral redistribution disadvantageous to the opposition;⁴¹ in the following May, a totally unprecedented and unexpected intervention by the Constitutional Court which demanded the dissolution of the National Assembly because of the delay in elections and its replacement by the Senate until the next elections, as well as a new government. The latter is only accountable to the head of state to whom ministers must swear a personal oath of loyalty. With regard to the

37. In the south-east, the Nzebis who also live across the border in Congo, where they played a major role in the civil war (see *below*), have been in opposition since their leader, Zacharie Myboto, resigned from the government in 2001.

38. According to these results, Jean Ping, although a Myene, achieved his best score in Woleu-Ntem province, in the heart of Fang country; see Presidential election in Gabon, 27 August 2016. OIF, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

39. Around 8,000 Gabonese (including 3,000 students) currently benefit from long-stay visas in France according to French consular statistics.

40. These constitutional amendments take into account the conclusions of the "Angondje National Dialogue" with a part of the opposition (March-May 2017).

41. With 23 members for Haut-Ogooué, as opposed to only 12 for Libreville and 4 for Port-Gentil, in an assembly increased to 140 members as opposed to 123 previously.

opposition, it remains divided. In this political and institutional confusion, one unknown remains: the final reactions of the capital's youth which started to politicize during Ali Bongo's first seven-year term.⁴² Repeated sectoral strikes, from the manufacturing sector to services, the civil service and state broadcasting, already show persistent social unrest, against a background of urban impoverishment, especially in Port-Gentil.

The fall in international oil prices combined with a downward trend in Gabonese production of around 10 million tons per year,⁴³ in fact caused the revenue from this sector to collapse between 2014 (1,300 billion CFA francs) and 2016 (420 billion). The gross domestic product (GDP) fell in current dollars from \$ 18 to 14 billion at the same time.⁴⁴ The Gabonese state's budget experienced a record deficit in 2016, the year of the presidential election.⁴⁵ This situation put an end to the phase of heavy state capital expenditure to renew badly maintained or obsolete infrastructure from the 1970s and 1980s (Owendo port, Transgabonais railway, roads, etc.). Furthermore, the annual wage bill of the civil service is high and ongoing.

Following the CEMAC Extraordinary Summit in December 2016, Gabon signed a three-year arrangement with the IMF in June 2017 for 464 million Special Drawing Rights (SDR), or about US \$ 642 million, adopted an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) aimed at, in addition to reducing its external debt, more transparency in and better management of public finances, as well as diversifying an economy still too dependent on oil. It was indeed a new structural adjustment program comparable to that of the 1980s, but without the name, that became synonymous with a neoliberal order in the Bretton Woods institutions.

The implementation of this program has for the most part proceeded without any major hitch with the donors, including France which has granted a three-year loan of € 225 million to support the Treasury.⁴⁶ Above all, the poor state of infrastructure is still impacting on economic diversification (a manganese train derailed in February 2018).⁴⁷ The social and political situation has also had a direct economic and financial effect, as sectoral strikes have contributed to the decline in oil production. This is

42. See the analysis by A. Aterianus-Owanga and M. Debain, "Demain, un jour nouveau?" Un renversement électoral confisqué au Gabon', *Politique africaine*, No. 144, 2016/4, pp. 157-179.

43. For details of current oil production, see the website www.agencececofin.com.

44. Source: World Bank, rounded figures.

45. For the detailed figures, see: IMF staff report for the first review of the Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) [...], Washington, International Monetary Fund, 4 December 2017, Table 3a. "Gabon: Comptes de l'Administration Centrale, 2014-2022", p. 27.

46. Michel Sapin promised in December 2016 in Yaoundé a budget of € 1 billion to support the CEMAC countries' recovery.

47. Although Gabon's manganese production reached a record at 5 million tons in 2017.

also impacted by the withdrawal of the *majors*: The Shell group, present since 1964, withdrew from Gabon in March 2017, while Total gave up its on-shore activities and is now no longer the leading operator, despite its historical links to the country. Wood is also in crisis since the poorly prepared ban on log exports in 2010; the bankruptcy filing of the French group, Rougier in early 2018, will only worsen the crisis in this sector.

In October 2017, the ratings agency, Fitch Ratings downgraded Gabon's sovereign credit rating from B+ to B. In February 2018, the forced requisition of shares and staff of the French company Veolia's subsidiary, responsible for water and electricity management in Libreville, raised "questions about the public-private partnerships (PPP) in Africa," as part of the regulated rule of law according to an employer's association's wording.⁴⁸ The foundation of a "Libreville Club", at the same time as a Paris Club treating public debt, in order to settle domestic debt⁴⁹ would also have irritated the IMF, fearing that the priority given to external debt would no longer be complied with. However, the next revision of the Hydrocarbons Code in a way that favors oil companies could help retain operators that are not attracted by either current taxation or production prospects: Gabon now only operates mature fields or ones of a limited size, whose production has been declining fairly rapidly since 2016, while exploration has not recently yielded promising results.⁵⁰

48. French Council of Investors in Africa, "Édito", *La lettre du CIAN*, March-April 2018, p. 1.

49. Very important although poorly identified and which in particular led to the withdrawal of Bouygues Energies et Services from Gabon in late 2017 due to non-payment.

50. For Gabon's oil prospects and their economic and social impact (from a field survey in April 2016 in Libreville and Port Gentil), see in particular B. Augé, "La baisse des cours du brut au Gabon miroir grossissant d'une crise structurelle de l'économie et de l'échec du politique", *L'Afrique en questions*, No. 26, Ifri, 12 July 2016.

Congo-Brazzaville: the spectre of civil war

Congo-Brazzaville's post-colonial fate is more troubled and tragic than Gabon's. Admittedly, there are similarities between the two countries, both of which have become defined as petro-states (see *above*). But, the case of Congo conforms the theory according to which this institutional type may be more sensitive than others to the risk of civil war.⁵¹

From colonization to Marxism

Congo's instability compared to Gabon is also down to history and geography: at the heart of an area that had built long-standing relationships with Europe,⁵² the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) is bordered to the east and south by two countries which have experienced civil war since their independence, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Angola. Larger (340,000 km²) and more populated than Gabon (5 million inhabitants according to the World Bank), the country stretches out in a shape along the river that follows no logic other than that of the principles of the 'scramble for Africa' at the Berlin Conference in 1885. During the colonial period, the area had hardly found its final form: its coast, where exploited oil resources are found nowadays, was only detached from Gabon after the First World War in order to build the Congo-Ocean rail road (CFCO) and Haut-Ogooué only became Gabonese again after the Second World War.

On independence, Congo-Brazzaville, which then only had 800,000 inhabitants, but already 100,000 in its capital, was in a comparable situation to Senegal in West Africa: the break-up of two colonial federations over which it exercised both political and economic central control, reduced it to now being a state with very limited power.

Internal tension further worsened the effects of this loss of international rank: Congolese political life has continued for more than half a century to oppose well-known figures violently mobilizing ethno-regional solidarities for manipulative purposes. This trend emerged even

51. R. Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-68.

52. The former kingdom of Kongo, whose capital is now in Angola, was Christianized at the end of the 15th century.

before independence with the clashes in Brazzaville in February 1959, but was particularly evident during the civil war in the last decade in the late 20th century, as emphasized by the anthropologist, Patrice Yengo.⁵³ A double geographical observation was also observed, favored by rapid urbanization, between Brazzaville, a potentially conflictual contact point between north and south, and Pointe-Noire, the seat of the Territorial Assembly, formed in 1958, and which still enjoys the prestige associated with the territory of the ancient coastal kingdoms, Loango and Cabinda.⁵⁴ This city, which nowadays has more than 1 million inhabitants (or two-thirds of Brazzaville's population), has lost its formal, political role, but remains an economic capital due to oil and the redevelopment of its commercial port. It is politically reactive, even more so than Port-Gentil in Gabon, and clearly showed its hostility to the new constitution in 2015.

The country's long shape reinforces its division into two, with two regional lingua francas, Lingala in the north and Kituba, a Kongo dialect, in the south. This opposition produces two major identities, but it must be put into perspective: in the north, the Mbochi dominant in Cuvette, as well as in the Brazzaville district of Poto-Poto, are opposed to the Kuyu and even more to the Teke, themselves very close linguistically and ethnically to the Nzebi, straddling the border with Gabon, but classified in the south because of their more southerly habitat. Also, in this area, the Lari from the Brazzaville district of Bakongo and the Pool region, which were attached to the former kingdom of Kongo, are clearly distinguished from the Vili of the coast who they separated from in the 16th century.

Even before independence, three major political trends were demonstrated by the major electoral divides that have since continued along an ethnic, but also ideological framework. In the 1959 general elections, the last ones before independence, the north, although less urbanized, was dominated as a whole, well beyond the Mbochi, by a socialist leader, Jacques Opangault, while the south was linked to the Congolese branch of Félix Houphouët-Boigny's African Democratic Assembly (RDA), and in the Brazzaville region, the Kongo-Lari vote supported a Catholic priest, Father Fulbert Youlou, who became the first President of the Republic. The latter wanted to reclaim the political legacy⁵⁵ of a Lari prophet, André Matsoua, who died imprisoned by the colonial administration for his pro-independence positions and who continued in

53. P. Yengo, *La guerre civile au Congo-Brazzaville, 1993-202*. "Chacun aura sa part", Paris: Karthala, 2006.

54. The latter is now part of Angola.

55. See R. Bazenguisa-Ganga, *Essai de sociologie historique*, Paris: Karthala, 1997, p. 64.

French Middle Congo the long tradition of political-religious opposition to Europeans that appeared in the former kingdom of Kongo.⁵⁶

The government of the newly independent Congo practiced nepotism in favor of the Lari and at the expense of other groups. Having chosen the pro-Western camp in the tensions that followed the independence of Belgian Congo, the president was overthrown by the popular “Three Glorious Days” movement (13-15 August 1963) when he wanted to introduce a single-party system. The unions played a crucial role, as a working class had been formed with industrialization at the end of colonization. Although French Community troops did not intervene against the rioters, the head of state resigned and entrusted the army with power, which then immediately handed it over to Father Fulbert Youlou’s cousin, Alphonse Massamba-Débat.

The latter, in turn, came up against the hostility of the youth of the National Movement of the Revolution (MNR) which replaced all the previous parties after the adoption of the December 1963 constitution, as the country increasingly became anti-imperialist. After further tension in August 1968, power was handed over to a National Council of the Revolution (CNR) which mainly military personnel from the north, Marien Ngouabi and Denis Sassou-Nguesso, for whom it was his first appearance in Congolese politics, sat on. In January 1970, with the adoption of a new constitution, the country became the People’s Republic of Congo, aligned with Moscow, where the President of the Congolese Party of Labour’s (PCT) Central Committee was statutorily head of state, before a little more democracy returned, between never-ending coup attempts, with the 1973 Constitution (re-establishing the role of Prime Minister and the National Assembly).⁵⁷

So, for a time, a tripartite governmental system (army, party and single trade union) was indeed formed, transcending the north-south opposition and whose balance was maintained beyond a particularly bloody and confused episode, the assassination in March 1977 of President Marien Ngouabi and then of the Cardinal-Archbishop of Brazzaville and the execution of the former President Massamba-Débat. But, with the coming to power of General Yhombi-Opango, a northerner of Kuyu origin like his predecessor, and then Colonel Sassou-Nguesso, the first Mbochi as head of state who replaced him in February 1978, it would then evolve

56. For André Matsoua and the “Amicalist” movement in Kongo society at the end of colonization, see the classic text by G. Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle de l’Afrique noire. Dynamique sociale en Afrique centrale*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971, pp. 396-416.

57. M. Soret, *Histoire du Congo Brazzaville*, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1978, pp. 194-205 ; also R. Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Essai de sociologique historique*, *op. cit.*

towards a soviet-type collegial system and then to a presidential model. In fact, it was fairly comparable to pro-Western Gabon, which Congo moved closer to since 1977. This shift was strongly supported in Paris by the oil group, Elf Aquitaine, which had managed to operate at that time in both countries with increasing success. However, the systems remained different: it was the PCT Congress which confirmed Denis Sassou-Ngesso in 1984 and 1989 for a five-year term as Head of the Party and State, and not a single-candidacy presidential election for a seven-year period as was the case for Omar Bongo.

Denis Sassou-Ngesso and the 1985 structural adjustment

This partial return to the West corresponded with Congo's transformation: the small, revolutionary country located alongside the pro-US Zaire (ex-Belgian Congo), lost its geopolitical dominance in the East-West rivalry in favor of Angola after its independence in 1975. It gradually turned into a typical petro-state (see *above*), with an initial capture phase by an emerging presidential power over the economy and the launch of major public works. Those in Brazzaville to celebrate its centenary in 1980 symbolized a return to France⁵⁸ at the expense of the Soviets, who nevertheless remained very present in Luanda, where the Marxist brother party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) also remained close to the PCT.

The economic boom begun in 1979, with annual growth reaching 20% and continued until 1985. But, then there was a very severe financial warning due to accumulated deficits in the balance of payments, the government's optimism did not anticipate a sudden and temporary decline in oil production. As Congo never left the franc zone system, it could not use the devaluation mechanism, which then led to it adopting a structural adjustment program for the first time conditional upon IMF assistance.⁵⁹ The 1982-1986 five-year plan was hit hard. Examination of Congo's public accounts also revealed a deep management failure with some operations not corresponding to any budgetary authorization.⁶⁰ The 1985-1987 adjustment program included a reduction in capital expenditure, but also in state operating expenditure, as well as the end of the subsidy system to unprofitable parastatal companies and the restriction of domestic credit which supported the previous boom. Foreign debt (the servicing of which

58. François Mitterrand made a triumphant visit to Brazzaville on 11 October 1982, the first by a French president since independence.

59. H. Diata, "Ajustement structurel au Congo", *Revue Tiers Monde*, 1989, No. 117, pp. 187-202.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

took nearly 100% of oil revenues⁶¹ in 1986) was rescheduled. Congo, whose ideology officially remained Marxism, was thus subjected to the same financial budgetary restrictions as neighboring Gabon, which was officially pro-Western, but whose method of economic control by a central state at the same time all powerful and very poorly managed, was similar.

In both cases, the highly personalized presidential system managed to survive this financial hardship, with political continuity also remaining, despite the weakness of governance, which is a key component of outside confidence.

It was the collapse of the USSR which hastened political openness in Congo-Brazzaville. This political adjustment, more than five years after the economic adjustment, was partly the result of social unrest caused by austerity in the public and parapublic sectors that overwhelmingly dominated the job market. An Extraordinary Congress of the PCT in December 1990 and then the National Conference⁶² from January to June 1991 and whose *praesidium* was entrusted to a Catholic bishop, Mgr Ernest Kombo, put an end to the Marxist regime, as well as Denis Sassou-Nguesso's personal power. A new constitution was overwhelmingly approved by referendum in 1992. However, in the elections which followed, the old three-way divisions of political life emerged again between a PCT which remained dominant in the north, the former Prime Minister Pascal Lissouba's Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS) leading in the south, and in the Brazzaville area, Bernard Kolélas' Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development (MCDDI) assumed Fulbert Youlou's political-religious legacy in the Lari country. In August 1992, Sassou-Nguesso was only third in a presidential election where Lissouba was elected in the second round due to the PCT's support against Kolélas. But, the negotiated agreement between the two rounds was not observed. Congo tipped over into civil war after the early parliamentary elections of October 1992, which were marked by a reversal of the alliance of the PCT with the MCDDI against Lissouba.

The cycle of civil war and the 2015 crisis

The cycle of civil war in Congo was characterized by two unequally intense stages, in 1993-1994, with a purely domestic conflict, and then in 1997, its regionalization, then involving Gabon⁶³ as well as Angola⁶⁴ and so allowing

61. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

62. Sovereign, unlike that of Gabon a year earlier.

63. Because of matrimonial alliances, Denis Sassou-Nguesso was Omar Bongo's father-in-law from 1990, and cross-border inter-ethnic relationships (see below note 53).

64. Because of the MPLA-PCT political alliance.

Denis Sassou-Nguesso to return to power. France, where he was temporarily exiled in 1995, only intervened to evacuate foreign nationals from Brazzaville in June 1997. A peace agreement officially ended the civil war in 1999, but a Lari revolt in 1998-2006 and then in 2016-2017 in fact was a new stage of the civil war, that was less analyzed than previous ones. Unlike them, it was not predominantly urban.⁶⁵ However, faced with government forces, it also mobilized militiamen around a political-religious leader, Frédéric Bintsamou known as “Pastor Ntumi” in a new version of Kongo prophetism.

In all these stages military forces were opposed, with significant weaponry and air assets in 1997, but also and above all, armed militiamen, who after the end of the Marxist regime, continued a tradition of armed youth to defend the revolution or any other cause on the basis of ethnic opposition. At the crossroads of banditry, looting and political engagement, the obscurity of their names emphasized the practice of urban gangs with light or heavy weapons: Sassou-Nguesso’s “Cobras”, Bernard Kolélas’s “Ninjas”, Lissouba’s “Zulus”, “Mambas” and “Cocoyes”.⁶⁶ After endless fighting between these militias, it was Angolan tanks taking control of Pointe-Noire from Cabinda,⁶⁷ which ended the political uncertainty⁶⁸ on 15 October 1997, handing power to Denis Sassou-Nguesso who had just reconquered the capital with MPLA air support in a very tense regional context where, after the fall of Mobutu in Zaire⁶⁹ in May, fighters from Jonas Savimbi’s National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) had taken refuge in Brazzaville.⁷⁰

The number of casualties in these different phases of civil war is very difficult to evaluate, especially the last one and if we also consider the transition period between 1997 and 2002.⁷¹ Nevertheless, a civil peace managed to gradually dominate the country’s political life where the public

65. R. Pourtier, “Brazzaville dans la guerre : crise urbaine et violences politiques”, *Annales de géographie*, No. 611, 2000, pp. 3-20.

66. Clashes were also sustained by the collective memory of the pre-colonial past: Teke, Obamba and Nzebi were formerly driven into Haut-Ogooué by the Mbochis. See H. Deschamps, *Traditions orales et archives au Gabon*, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1962, pp. 50-62.

67. Where the MPLA have fought since 1975 against a pro-independence movement, the FLEC, which are occasionally active in Congo-Brazzaville, see J. Figueira Martin, “Histoire d’une guérilla fantôme. Le(s) front(s) de libération de l’enclave du Cabinda”, *Études de l’Ifri*, January 2017.

68. President Lissouba’s term ended on 31 August 1997, without any further elections because of the fighting.

69. Then becoming Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s Democratic Republic of Congo, supported by both Rwanda and Angola.

70. D. Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 115.

71. Consequently, P. Yengo, *La guerre civile au Congo-Brazzaville, 1993-2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 8, mentions 3,000 dead in 1993 and 20,000 in 1997. See also R. Pourtier, “Brazzaville dans la guerre: crise urbaine et violences politiques”, *art. cit.*, p. 11, “at least 2,000 dead” in 1994, 5,000 to 10,000 dead in 1997.

opinion was tired of war. Denis Sassou-Nguesso was elected president for seven years without competition in 2002, in accordance with a democratic constitution. Relying on his status as the most experienced of the Central African heads of states since Omar Bongo's death, he has consequently strengthened his international role, especially in regional mediations and defense of the environment. Despite the current crisis, this pro-active diplomacy has not disappeared: in April 2018, Brazzaville hosted a Climate Summit and a Congo Basin Blue Fund which the Gabonese president attended and whose guest of honor was the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI.⁷²

A political stalemate re-emerged in 2015 with the adoption by referendum of a new constitution⁷³ allowing the head of state to stand for re-election beyond two terms and 70 years of age. He was re-elected with 60% of the votes in the first round in March 2016. The results, like in Gabon several months later, were validated by the Constitutional Court, but challenged by his opponents, Guy-Brice Parfait Kolélas, the Lari political leader who succeeded his dead father, and General Jean-Marie Mokoko, until then the presidential Security Advisor and a northerner like him, who was opposed to the change in the constitution. When the latter was imprisoned in 2016, along with many others, it was the citizens' organizations (Ras-le-bol Movement) and the Congolese diaspora, swollen by the war,⁷⁴ which took over the leadership of a fixed political life, where there was no longer parliamentary representation by the opposition, since it had decided to boycott the elections in March 2017. Simultaneously, very tough repression in the Pool region against the new Ninja rebellion with air support caused a dramatic humanitarian situation at the gates of Brazzaville up to the start of 2018.⁷⁵

In this once again, very tense political climate, the economic crisis which struck Congo was more serious than that in Gabon. GDP fell sharply, going from \$ 14.2 billion in current dollars in 2014 to \$ 8.5 billion in 2015, and then \$ 7.8 billion in 2016, according to the World Bank, although it grew more than 4% per year on average from 2009 to 2013, a period

72. "Déclaration commune des Chefs d'États", Brazzaville, Climate Fund and Congo Basin Blue Fund, 29 April 2018, available at: www.mediatorre.org.

73. Consequently, Congo-Brazzaville has had 12 constitutions or constitutional acts since its independence.

74. It now has at least 300,000 people, according to figures released without it being possible to verify this.

75. For political prisoners and armed clashes, see in particular: *Amnesty International, Rapport 2017-2018. La situation des droits humains dans le monde*, Amnesty International, 2018, p. 163-165, "Congo 2017-2018": clashes between government forces and Ninjas have reportedly encouraged about a third of Pool's inhabitants to flee. The number of displaced persons is estimated at 81,000, 59,000 of whom were recorded in 2017. Available at: www.amnesty.org.

marked by major infrastructure works, particularly in Brazzaville. These had to be completed in the middle of a recession. The increasingly disordered public finances suffered from a lack of cash, mainly resulting in late payments for civil servants.

The state's commitments were difficult to identify accurately, because of the neo-patrimonial system dominated by informal and personalized agreements, the state's authorization having been given erratically and corruptly. Huge public deficits (thought to be 40% of GDP for 2015) were largely secured by deposit withdrawals and advances from the BEAC, as well as a generalized system of advance oil sales.⁷⁶ These were very temporary cash solutions, which were disastrous for public finances and made the option chosen collectively by the CEMAC countries in Yaoundé in 2016, that is to say recourse to the IMF for assistance, even more urgent. But, negotiations started with the Funds in 2017 initially failed, Congo had concealed a very large part of its foreign debt (to China and oil companies), estimated at the end of 2017 at more than 110% of its GDP and which had increased two-and-a-half times in two years.⁷⁷ In July, the rating agencies Standard & Pools and then Moody's were very pessimistic and downgraded their sovereign rating for Congo from a B rating (very speculative) to a C rating (ultra-speculative).

It was not until April 2018 that an IMF mission to Congo, concomitant with a meeting of Franc Zone ministers in Brazzaville, reached a successful conclusion. The Funds required Congo to carry out "immediate and bold governance reforms" and to effectively to give up "past practices."⁷⁸ If the IMF granted assistance, France confirmed that it would grant a loan of €135 million, in return for an anti-corruption law⁷⁹ and despite its reservations about the country's political and security situation.⁸⁰

The projected increase in oil production up to a level of about 300,000 barrels/day (15 million tons/year) for 2018, intersecting with an increase in

76. Summary of personal information, March-April 2018, Paris. The system of pledging oil production to obtain cash had already been used by President Lissouba.

77. More than half of the public debt may be held by Chinese interests as part of the partnership agreement since 2006. Domestic debt (stock of arrears) may represent 20% of GDP according to the IMF.

78. "Bold and immediate governance reforms to put into effect the government's proclaimed intention to mark a break with past policies and practices", according to an IMF statement in April 2018, "IMF Staff Concludes Program Negotiation Mission to the Republic of Congo", available at: www.imf.org.

79. "We are expecting concrete legislative action on the fight against corruption in the Republic of Congo.", statement to Radio France Internationale (RFI) by the French Minister of the Economy and Finance, Bruno Lemaire in Brazzaville. "Bruno Le Maire: "The CFA franc guarantees all its member states stability", *RFI*, 16 April 2018, available at: www.rfi.fr.

80. In its military co-operation with Congo-Brazzaville, as with Gabon, France now avoids being involved, even indirectly, in maintaining order: it has just suspended co-operation activity with the Congolese gendarmerie.

global prices, should help the country's economic recovery and growth in GDP may become positive under these conditions. The prospects for oil production in Congo, where Total, at a current production level of around 200,000 barrels/day, is by far the main operator due to the Moho Nord field, are much better in deep *offshore* than in Gabon.⁸¹

The political adjustment could also be confirmed during the year: the presidential majority decided in April to “repatriate embezzled funds” based on the Angola model and to prioritize the fight against corruption. The Catholic bishops in Congo, who met in an extraordinary session from 8 to 10 May,⁸² identifying the 2015 constitutional reform as the root of the crisis, called for the opening of “the broadest possible political dialogue” consequently witnessing the return of the institutional churches to the public arena. However, the conviction of General Mokoko in a speedy trial, followed by other trials and new arrests, at the same time showed a continued atmosphere of repression.

81. Personal information, Paris, May 2018. The proven reserves of this field are about 400 million barrels.

82. Episcopal Conference of Congo, “Message des évêques du Congo, Thursday 10 May 2018”, 10 May 2018, available at: www.cecongo.org. The Catholic Church of Congo, which has seven bishops, is politically more visible than in Gabon.

Conclusion and future scenarios

Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon both have the characteristics of petro-states *on the brink of failure*.⁸³ The 1985 economic and financial crisis preceded the 1990 political crisis; their simultaneous return now highlights the severity of the current situation in both countries which will have to emerge from neo-patrimonial governance and a single-production economy. If the structural problems are not dealt with, the increase in oil prices in 2018 can only produce a short-term and illusory improvement.

Despite the current similarities, the immediate prospects are as different as in the past for each one of these two states:

- In Gabon, financial adjustment dominates over political adjustment: the internal dialogue is blocked and is not open to outside influences, but the financial adjustment has been underway for more than a year. The diversification of the economy, also already outlined, is all the more urgent as oil resources are dwindling, but 2018 should be better than previous one in terms of public revenue.
- In Congo, domestic political adjustment is still lacking, but the government is pursuing active diplomacy, particularly in its region (Central African Republic and DRC). The future of oil seems relatively secure with regard to production capacity, but the advance sale of crude oil and the abuses of the state's financial management have led to a budgetary deadlock and the need for an agreement as soon as possible with the IMF; in this respect, 2018 will still be very difficult, despite the increase in physical production of crude oil. The immediate future will also depend on the internal development of neighboring countries: although it is unlikely that Angola will intervene again militarily in Brazzaville, the current regional situation is no longer that of 1997,⁸⁴ "the end of presidential absolutism" in Luanda⁸⁵ could have an impact on the Congo.

83. R. Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

84. Personal information, Paris and London, April 2018.

85. M. de Alencastro, "Angola under Lourenço. Towards a Negotiated Hegemony", *Notes de l'Ifri*, February 2018.

In the medium and long term, there are also unknowns as to the level of additional mineral wealth or possible alternatives to oil resources: manganese in Gabon and potash and iron in the Congo.

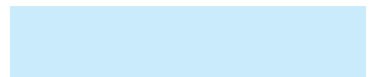
Despite these differences, four common scenarios are foreseeable for both countries: a continuation of the *status quo* worsening the CEMAC crisis and jeopardizing the current exchange rate of the CFA franc; political and financial efforts which are still insufficient; an inclusive national dialogue leading to increased democratization and financial transparency; a worsening of the crisis under the effects of financial adjustment, bringing about regime change.

Given the previous analysis, the first scenario can be rejected. International pressure, and particularly from the IMF, has become too strong for both governments to not force them to at least partially emerge from the petro-state concept.

The second scenario seems the most realistic, maintaining a very repressive domestic commitment, while providing pledges – mainly financial – abroad. Progress in transparency and a reduction in the government's lifestyle would then determine the level of effective reform in management, but the political regime would remain hybrid despite criticism.

The third scenario, with the launch of a broad, inclusive reconciliation process, the most favorable assumption for a long-lasting recovery, is however foreseeable in the medium term, but this time would no longer happen via “national conferences.” It would undoubtedly take different forms in Gabon and Congo, where the political power relationships, position of the churches and the development of civil society are not similar. The diaspora, particularly important for Congo, would play a more significant role than previously in this process.

The increasing severity of the socio-economic situation and urban impoverishment since 2015 could finally prompt this last scenario. However, the likelihood of an anti-government mass protest, as in Burkina Faso, remains very low. The conditions for a negotiated change from the top, like the Zimbabwe model, no longer seem to be met for the time being.



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