

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Gabonese Republic

**CAPITAL:** Libreville

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Unitary Multiparty Republic

**AREA:** 267,667 Sq Km (103,347 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION** 1,465,700

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Gabon is located on the west coast of Africa. It is bound by Congo to the northeast, east and south, Cameroon to the north, Equatorial Guinea to the northwest and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. Most of the country is covered in dense equatorial rain forests while its coastal plains are narrow and typified by lagoons and estuaries, such as the N'Dogo, N'Goze and N'Komi lagoons. The interior rises in a series of steps to the Central African Plateau. In the north the Crystal Mountains enclose the valleys of the Woleu and N'Tem Rivers as well as the Ivindo River Basin. In southern Gabon the coastal plain is dominated by granite hills and almost the entire country is situated on the Ogooue River with its two major tributaries, the N'Gounie and Ivindo Rivers. Major Cities (pop. est.); Libreville 419,600, Port Gentil 78,200, Franceville 83,000 (1993). Land Use; forested 77%, pastures 18%, agricultural-cultivated 2%, other 3% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Gabon has an equatorial climate that is characterized by hot, wet and humid conditions. During the wet season abundant rainfall occurs with the average annual precipitation in Libreville, 2,500 mm (98 inches) while between June to September there is virtually no rain. Temperatures are fairly constant with little variation all year round. Average temperature ranges in Libreville are from 24 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) to 27 degrees Celsius (81 degrees Fahrenheit) all year.

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**PEOPLE:** The Gabonese belong to 40 Bantu tribes which are divided into four tribal groups. The Fang, Eshira, M'bede and Okande which combined account for the majority of the population. Other minority groups include the Duma, Kanda, Seke, Mbeté, Bakele or Bongom and the Pygmies. Around 10% of the population are French or other expatriate Europeans.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 5 persons per sq km (12 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 43.8% urban, 56.2% rural (1988). Sex Distribution; 49.1% male, 50.9% female (1985). Life Expectancy at Birth; 49.9 years male, 53.2 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 35% under 15, 24% 15 to 29, 18% 30 to 44, 13% 45 to 59, 8% 60 to 74, 2% 75 and over (1985). Birth Rate; 39.4 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 16.8 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 22.6 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 103.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

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**RELIGIONS:** Mostly Christians which account for 96% of the population, of which around 65% are Roman Catholic. The remainder follow local native tribal beliefs and less than 1% are Muslims.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is French, although Fang is spoken widely in the north and Myene as well as Bateke are also spoken.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: N/A. Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 60.7% (1990).

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** Gabon began to move towards independence after World War II and it gained internal self government from France in 1958. On August 17, 1960 Gabon became an independent nation and Leon Mba was elected President in Feb. 1961. In Jan. 1964 Pres. Mba dissolved the National Assembly, promising fresh elections in February. On Feb. 18, 1964 the military ousted him and installed Jean-Hilaire Aubame as head of state. France intervened and reinstated Mba as President. Mba was reelected in 1964 and 1967 until his death in Nov. 1967. Albert-Bernard Bongo then Vice President acceded Mba to the Presidency and in Mar. 1968 decreed Gabon a single party state. In 1973 influenced by Libya, Pres. Bongo became a Muslim, changed his name to Omar and cut off relations with Israel. In 1981 there were antigovernment demonstrations which resulted in arrests and harsh sentencing, although most were later reprieved in Nov. 1982. In early 1988 French newspapers were removed from circulation after they alleged Pres. Bongo had misused French aid. In Jan. 1990 strikes and protests provoked by austerity measures resulted in the postponement of elections and discussions regarding constitution changes. In Feb. 1990 Pres. Bongo ended his party's monopoly and legalized opposition parties. In Mar. 1991 violence marred the legislative elections and by May six opposition parties had boycotted the Assembly and called for the formation of a new government. In June 1991 Prime Minister Casimir Oye Mba dissolved his government and formed another while from April to September schools were closed by teachers demanding long awaited and promised pay increases as well as better working conditions. On Mar. 23, 1992 a demonstrator was killed during clashes between security forces and striking teachers while in June 1992 France and Gabon participated in joint military exercises. In Aug. 1992 Pres. Bongo's government easily survived a vote of no-confidence over opposition claims of stalling municipal elections. In Apr. 1993 thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in protest to regional living standards and demanded the installation of running water, electricity and sealed roads. In April and May 1993 both the African Development Bank and France announced loans to improve the country's industry and infrastructure. On June 4, 1993 the Omar Bongo University in Libreville was closed due to disturbances during annual exams. In Sept. 1993,

10 newspapers were suspended for failing to seek authorization to publish. On Dec. 10, 1993 the country's first multiparty elections were held with Pres. Bongo be reelected to power.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the CFA Franc (Communaute Financiere Africaine-CFAF) divided into 100 Centimes.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$5,002,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$2,889,000,000 (1993). Imports; CFAF 230,000,000,000 (1992). Exports; CFAF 614,000,000,000 (1992). Tourism Receipts; USD \$5,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; CFAF 877,000,000,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 376,000 or 37.0% of total population (1993). Unemployed; N/A.

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partners are France, Germany, the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Bananas, Cassava, Cocoa, Coffee, Iron Ore, Livestock, Maize, Manganese, Oil, Palm Oil, Plantains, Petroleum, Rice, Sugar Cane, Timber, Uranium.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Agriculture, Fishing, Food Processing, Forestry, Mining, Petroleum Production and Refining.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Manganese, Petroleum, Timber, Uranium.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 648 km (403 mi) (1988), passenger-km 34,000,000 (21,127,000 passenger-mi) (1987), cargo ton-km 184,000,000 (126,022,000 short ton-mi) (1987). Roads; length 6,898 km (4,286 mi) (1987). Vehicles; cars 19,000 (1989), trucks and buses 15,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 26 (1990), deadweight tonnage 29,237 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 445,273,000 (276,680,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 26,079,000 (17,862,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 1 with a circulation of 20,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 155,000 (1994). Television; receivers 40,000 (1994). Telephones; units 29,800 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 4,700 (1995) total active duty personnel with 68.1% army, 10.6% navy and 21.3% air force while military expenditure accounts for 3.4% (1990) of the Gross National Product (GNP).

