

## GABON: Prospect of Bongo's return lowers political risk, for now

Footage published on 3 December showing President Ali Bongo recuperating in Morocco suggests Gabon's ruler might beat the odds and stage a comeback within the coming months. The Constitutional Court has found a fudge to allow for a temporary vacancy at the heart of government to enable a return of the ailing president – although it remains entirely unclear if and when that might happen. For now, the prospect of Bongo potentially returning to office soon lowers the political risks to the sovereign outlook; however, if the current limbo persists for more than a couple of weeks, pressures to declare him [permanently incapacitated](#) will mount again.

The usual caveats apply, but it appears Bongo's condition has improved markedly (which is somewhat at odds with the details regarding the incident leading to his hospitalization on 24 October as reported by Reuters and Le Monde). On 29 November, Bongo was transferred from Riyadh to a military hospital in Morocco, where his recovery continues. The first proof of life since October emerged in form of a photograph showing him next to his friend Muhammad VI, King of Morocco. A short [video](#) without sound surfaced as well, probably taken on the same occasion. It features Bongo sipping from a glass of milk. While the footage suggests at the very least, that Bongo is not completely paralyzed following surgery, it does little to remove the doubts and limbo around his ability to govern. Crucially, the fact that Bongo has not yet addressed the Gabonese people with a televised speech would suggest that his convalescence still has some way to go.

Meanwhile, back in Libreville, the ruling circle appears to have found a fudge to bridge the time until Bongo has recuperated. Note that there are no provisions in the constitution on how to handle a situation where the president is only temporarily unable to exercise his duties. However, the Constitutional Court, under its general powers to interpret the Constitution, decided to authorize a request from the prime minister to hold a cabinet meeting last month.

The court did so apparently after having been shown medical certificates attesting that the president was alive and well. While the decision was a one-off, it stands to reason that the Court – headed by Marie-Madeleine Mborantsuo, Bongo's mother-in-law – would authorize more cabinet meetings going forward as the need arises. To trigger the succession procedure, the Court would need to receive a request signed by a majority of cabinet members or, failing that, by the bureaus (i.e. executive committees) of the two chambers of Parliament with a majority of their members. For now, it seems, there is no majority for such a move.

[Client Portal >>](#)

**Malte Liewerscheidt**  
Vice President  
+44 20 7186 8870  
[malte.liewerscheidt@teneo.com](mailto:malte.liewerscheidt@teneo.com)