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Gabon
Gabon: Current Path

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Table of contents

Gabon: Current Path

Gabon: Current Path forecast

Chart 1: Political map of Gabon
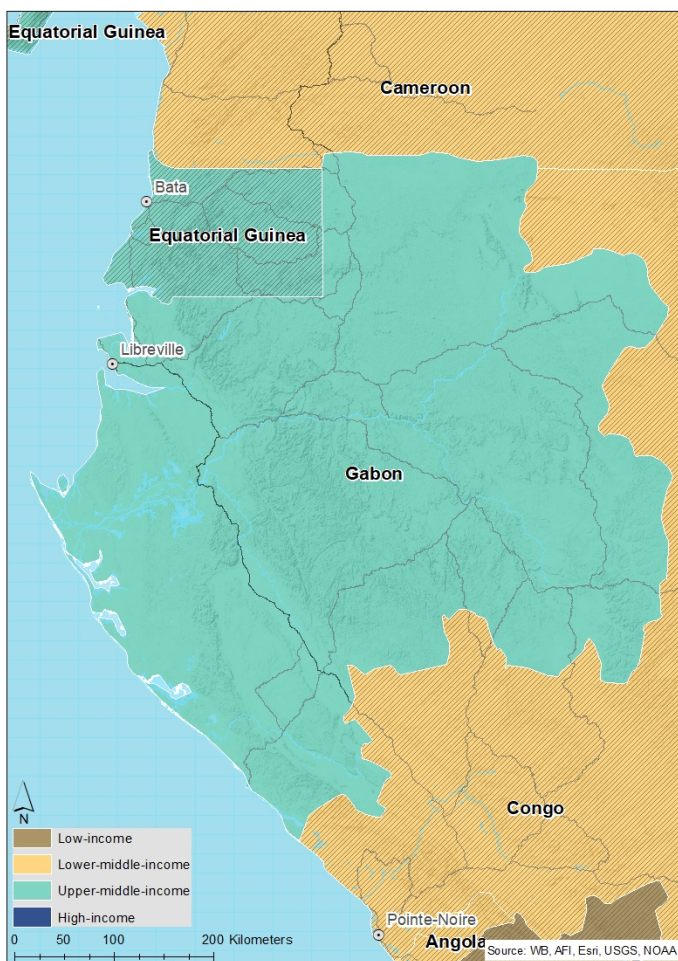
This page provides an overview of the key characteristics of Gabon along its likely (or Current Path, CP) development trajectory. The Current Path forecast from the International Futures forecasting (IFs) platform is a dynamic scenario that imitates the continuation of current policies and environmental conditions. The Current Path is therefore in congruence with historical patterns and produces a series of dynamic forecasts endogenised in relationships across crucial global systems. We use 2019 as a standard reference year and the forecasts generally extend to 2043 to coincide with the end of the third ten-year implementation plan of the African Union's Agenda 2063 long-term development vision.

Gabon lies on the equator, along the west coast of Central Africa. The country covers an area of about 270 000 km2 and

had an estimated population of 2.2 million people in 2019. It is bordered by Equatorial Guinea to the northwest, Cameroon to the north, the Republic of the Congo to the east and south and the Gulf of Guinea to the west. There are four ecoregions:[1] Atlantic Equatorial Coastal forest; Central African mangroves; the Gulf of Guinea central region; and the northwestern Congolian lowland forest. Gabon's capital and largest city is Libreville. The official language is French.

The Kingdom of Orungu formed in Gabon by the 18th century and became a powerful trading centre, mainly due to the slave trade. Since its independence from France in 1960, the sovereign state of Gabon has had three presidents. In the early 1990s, the country introduced a multi-party system and a new democratic constitution, which allowed for a more transparent electoral process and reformed many governmental institutions.

In 1975, Gabon became a full member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The country cancelled its membership in 1995, but rejoined the organisation in 2016.

Abundant petroleum and foreign direct investment turned Gabon into one of the most prosperous countries in sub-Saharan Africa. However, because of inequality in income distribution, a significant share of the population remains poor.
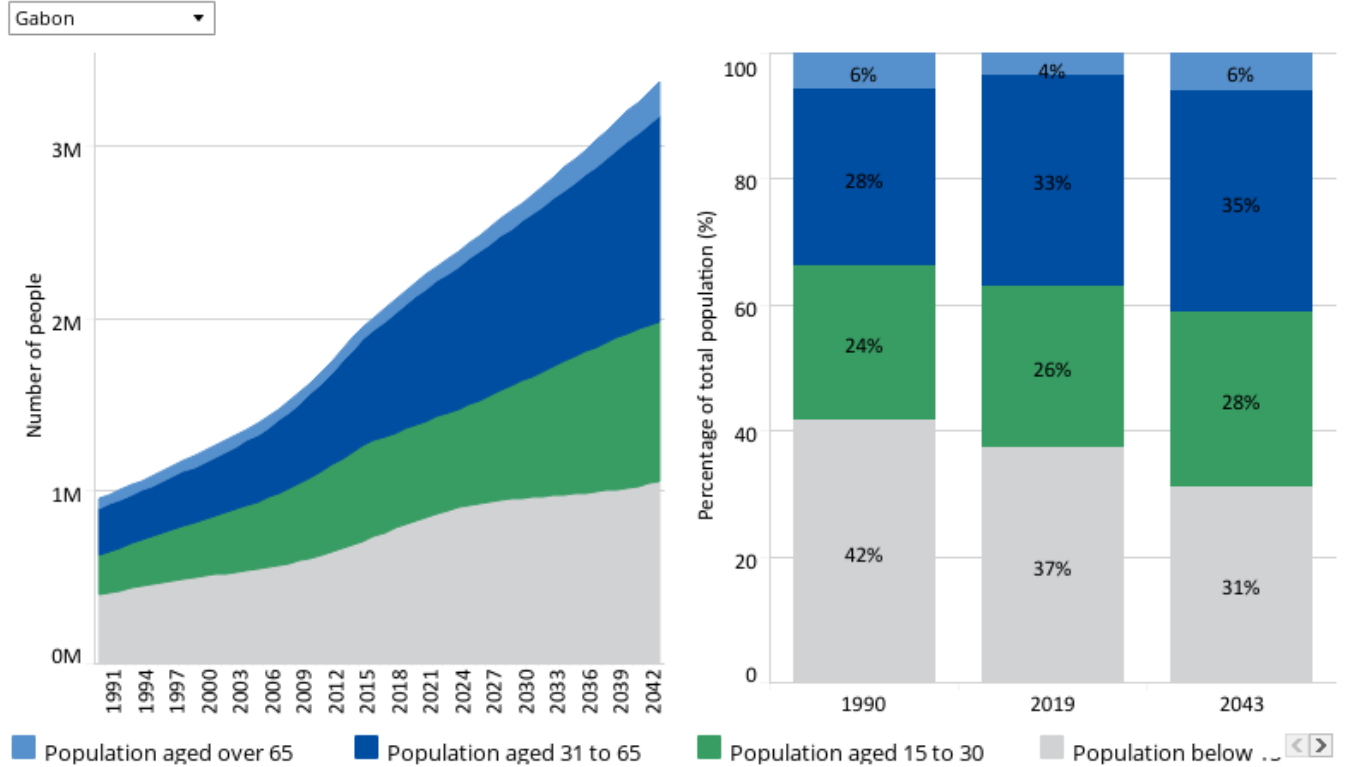
Chart 2: Population structure in CP, 1990–2043
By cohort and % of population

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Gabon

Population aged over 65 ■ Population aged 31 to 65 ■ Population aged 15 to 30 ■ Population below ..

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division Population Prospects estimate and World Development Indicators population data

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From a baseline of hardly a million people in 1990, Gabon's population had more than doubled – to about 2.2 million people – by 2019. The country's population is expected to increase to approximately 3.4 million people over the next two decades. In 2019, the population growth rate stood at 2.4%, 11th lowest in Africa and third lowest among upper middle-income economies in Africa.

Regardless, Gabon's population is relatively young. In 2019, half of the population was younger than 22.4 years and 37% was younger than 15. On the Current Path, Gabon's age structure is expected to mature further. By 2043, the share of the population under 15 years old will drop to 31%, with the older age cohorts constituting a larger share of the overall population.

Gabon has a total fertility rate of 3.9, which, by 2043, is expected to have dropped to 3.5 births per woman. As a consequence, the median age is projected to increase to 25 years.

In 2019, the country's average life expectancy was 66.9 years. On average, women lived to 68.6 years and men to 66.9 years. Life expectancy of Gabonese citizens is expected to increase to 71.1 years over the next two decades along the Current Path, above the average life expectancy of 70 years for Africa's upper middle-income economies.

A higher life expectancy would be a boost to Gabon's workforce. By 2043, the country's working-age population is expected

to account for about 62.7% of the population, up from 59% in 2019. Indeed, the ratio of people of working age relative to the dependent population is improving and expected to reach its demographic 'sweet spot' in 2043 (from 1.4 in 2019 to 1.7 in 2043).
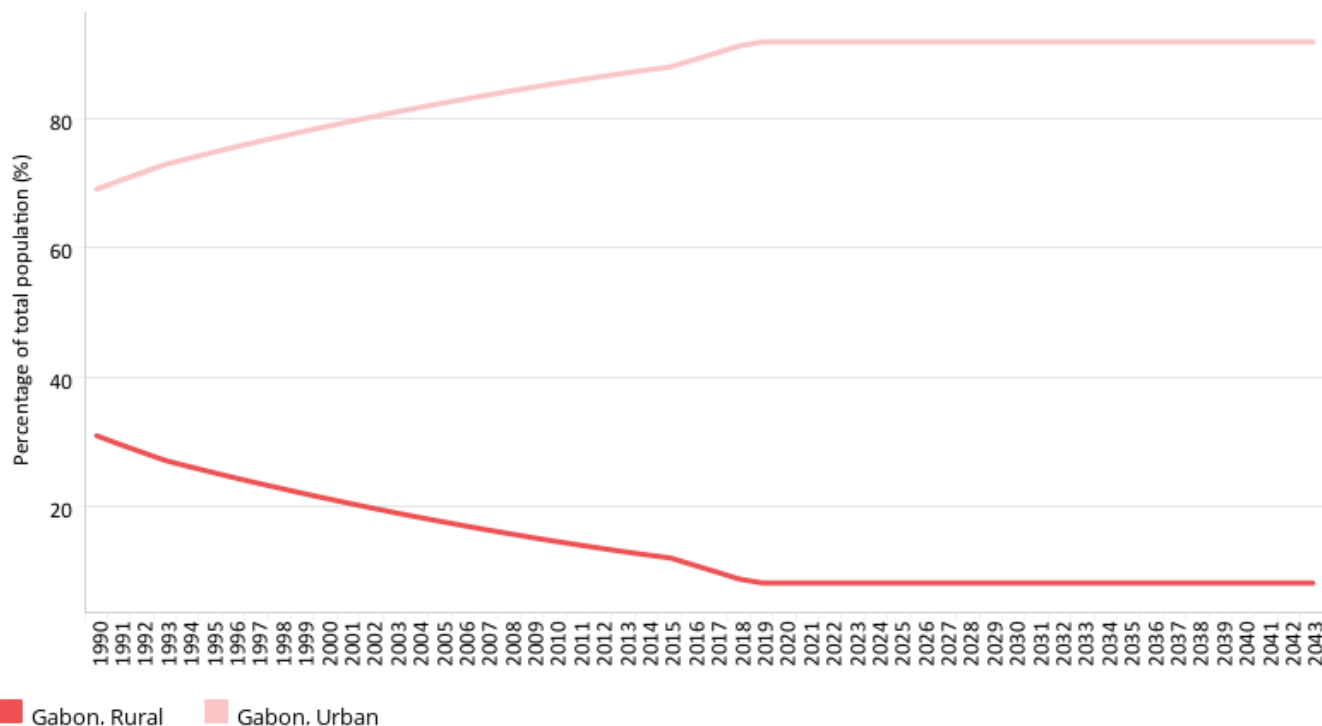
Chart 3: Urban and rural population in CP, 1990–2043
% of population

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Legend: ■ Gabon. Rural   ■ Gabon. Urban

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN World Urbanization Prospects estimate

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Gabon is the most urbanised country in Africa. In 2019, 92% of the country's population lived in urban areas. The average African upper middle-income country has a ratio of 68.4% urban versus 31.6% rural citizens. Gabon's high rate of urbanisation is not forecast to change over the coming decades.

Chart 4: Population density map for 2019
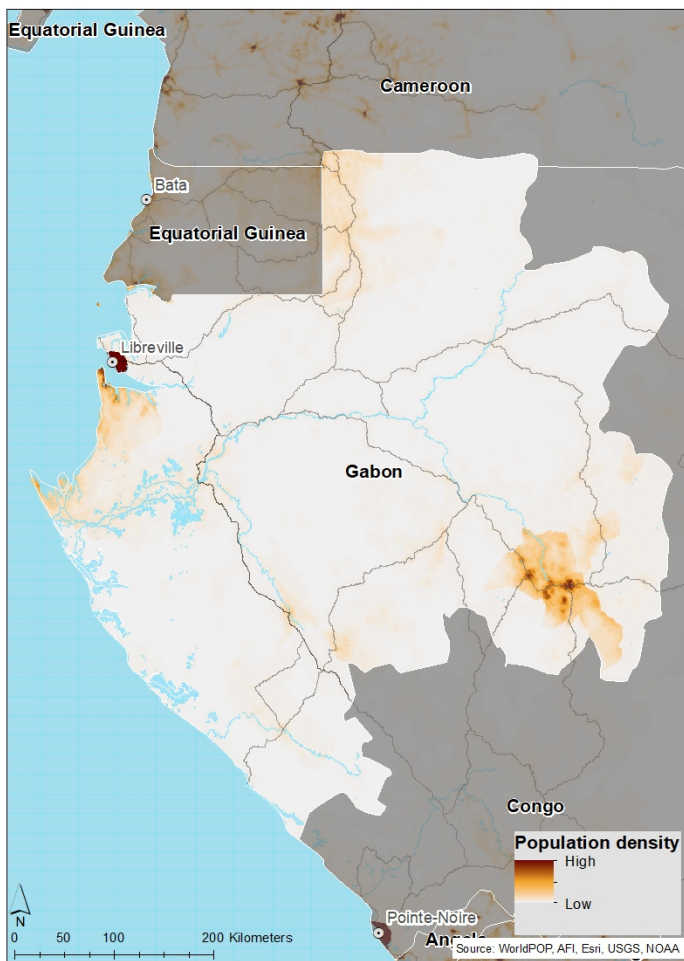
Of the approximately 2.2 million people in Gabon in 2019, about a quarter were concentrated in the country's capital, Libreville (578 000 inhabitants) according to the World Population Review. Libreville is in the northwestern province of Estuaire. The second largest city is Port-Gentil, with close to 110 000 residents, followed by Franceville with about 43 000 residents, and Oyem and Moanda with about 30 000 residents each. At 8.4 persons per square kilometre, population density in Gabon is low. The largest ethnic group in Gabon are the Fang people, representing about a third of the country's population.

Economics: Current Path

Chart 5: GDP in CP, 1990–2043
Market exchange rates
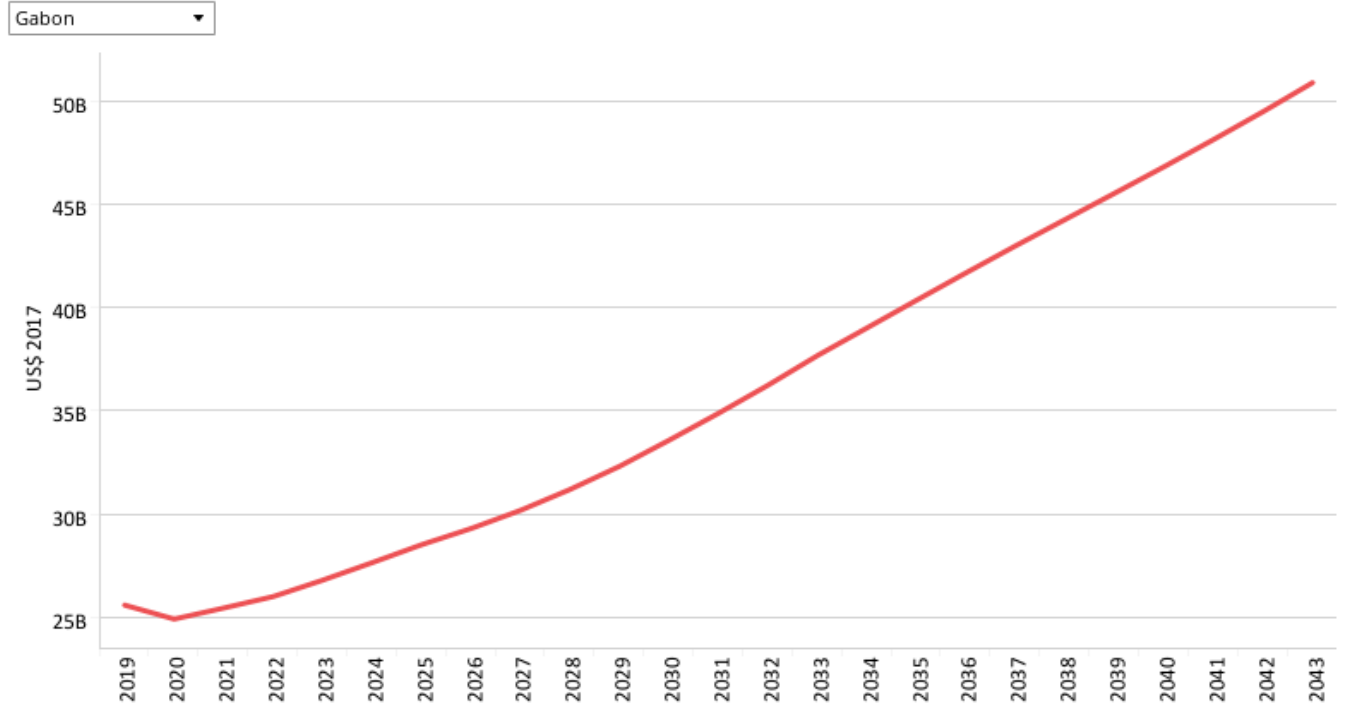
Gabon

Gabon

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

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Gabon's GDP nearly doubled between 1990 and 2019, from US$13.7 billion to US$25.6 billion. The country ranks fourth out of eight African upper middle-income economies, with Mauritius and Libya being the lead economies. In 2043, Gabon's GDP is forecast to reach US$50.9 billion, essentially double its size in 2019.

Gabon is Africa's fifth largest oil producer and a net oil exporter. In addition, the country possesses abundant primary materials and also has growing agriculture and tourism sectors. Other notable exports are timber, uranium and manganese.

Gabon's oil industry started gaining attention in 1931 when several oil deposits were discovered in regions neighbouring the capital Libreville. In addition to the oil industry, the fishing industry is an important economic sector of Gabon.[2]

Gabon is currently classified as an upper middle-income country by the World Bank, although its oil wealth has not benefited the overall population. Poverty levels are far too high given its economic status. Poverty is exacerbated by high levels of inequality. Gabon's oil dependency for revenue makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in the global oil price.

Chart 6: GDP per capita in CP, 1990–2043
Purchasing power parity

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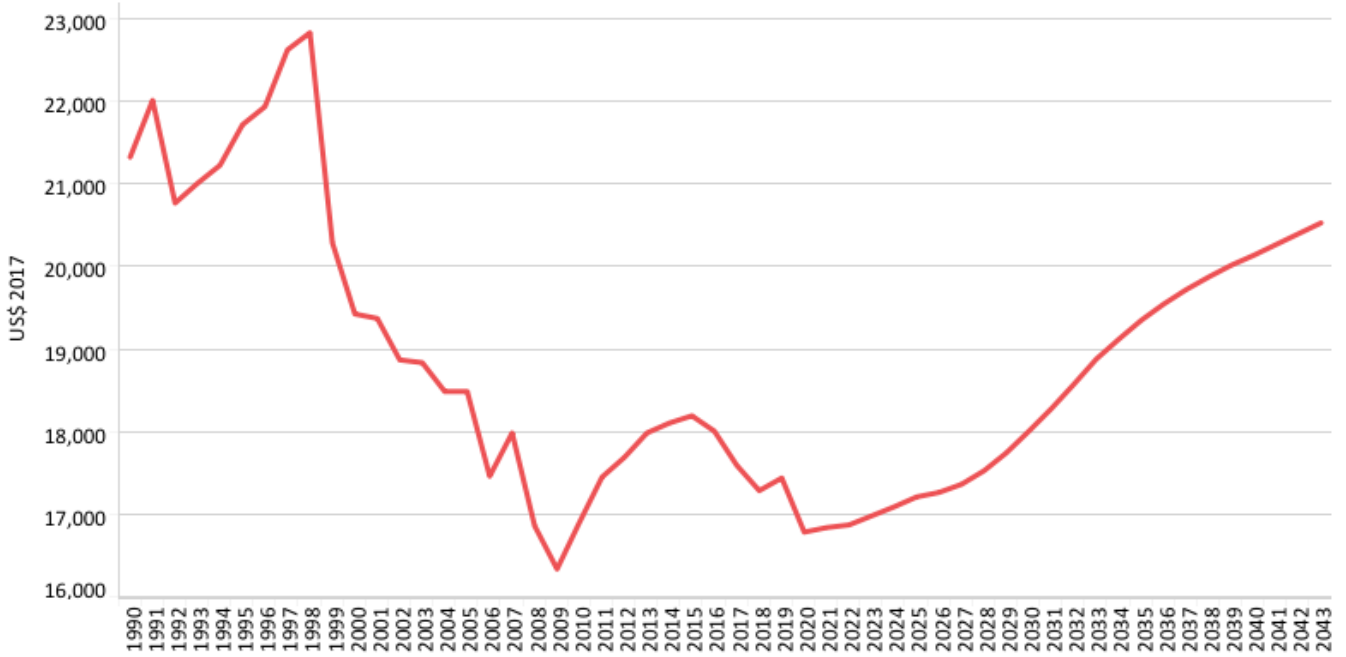
Gabon ▼

■ Gabon

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division World Population Prospects and World Development Indicators data

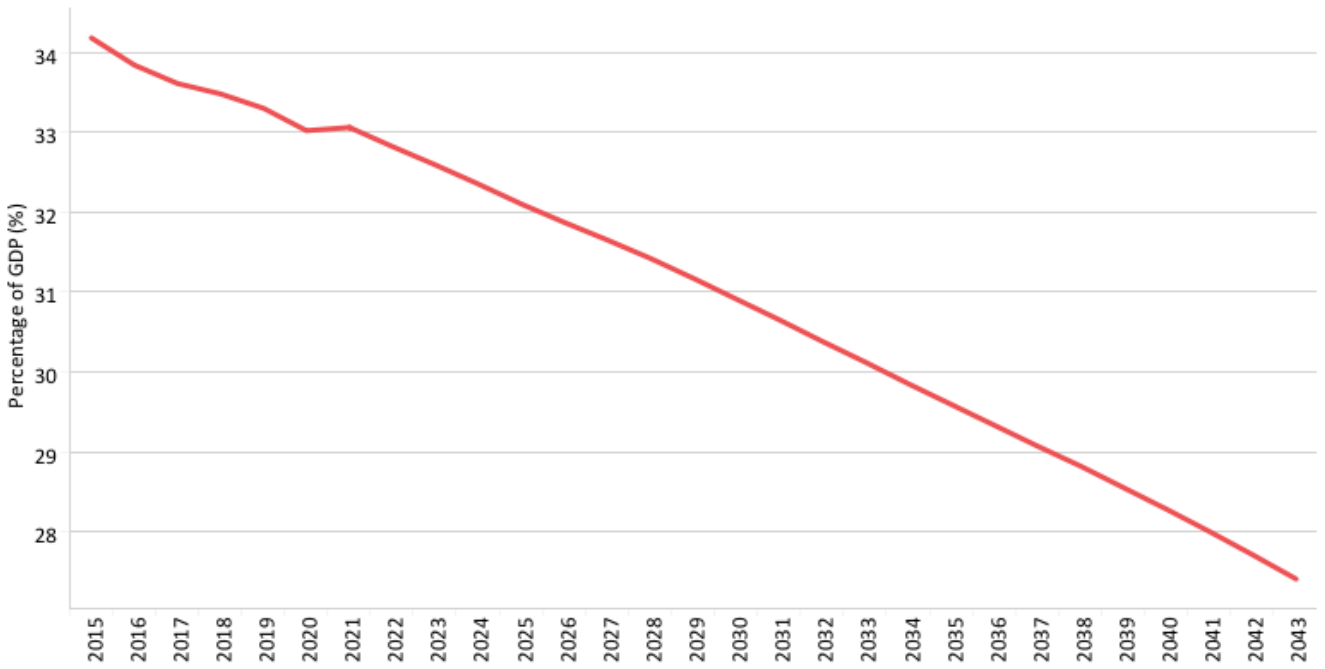⁙ View on Tableau Public   ↺ ↻ ↶ ↷ ▼ | ⬇▼ ⬚ ⌗ Share

Although many of the charts in the sectoral scenarios also include GDP per capita, this overview is an essential point of departure for interpreting the general economic outlook of Gabon.

In 2019, Gabon's GDP per capita was US$17 440, more than US$3 000 above the African upper middle-income group average of US$14 235. On the Current Path, Gabon's per capita income will rise to US$20 525 by 2043.

Chart 7: Informal sector value in CP, 2015–2043
% of GDP

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Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Economic Commission for Europe [2008]; Elgin and Oztunali [2012]; Schneider and Enste [2012]

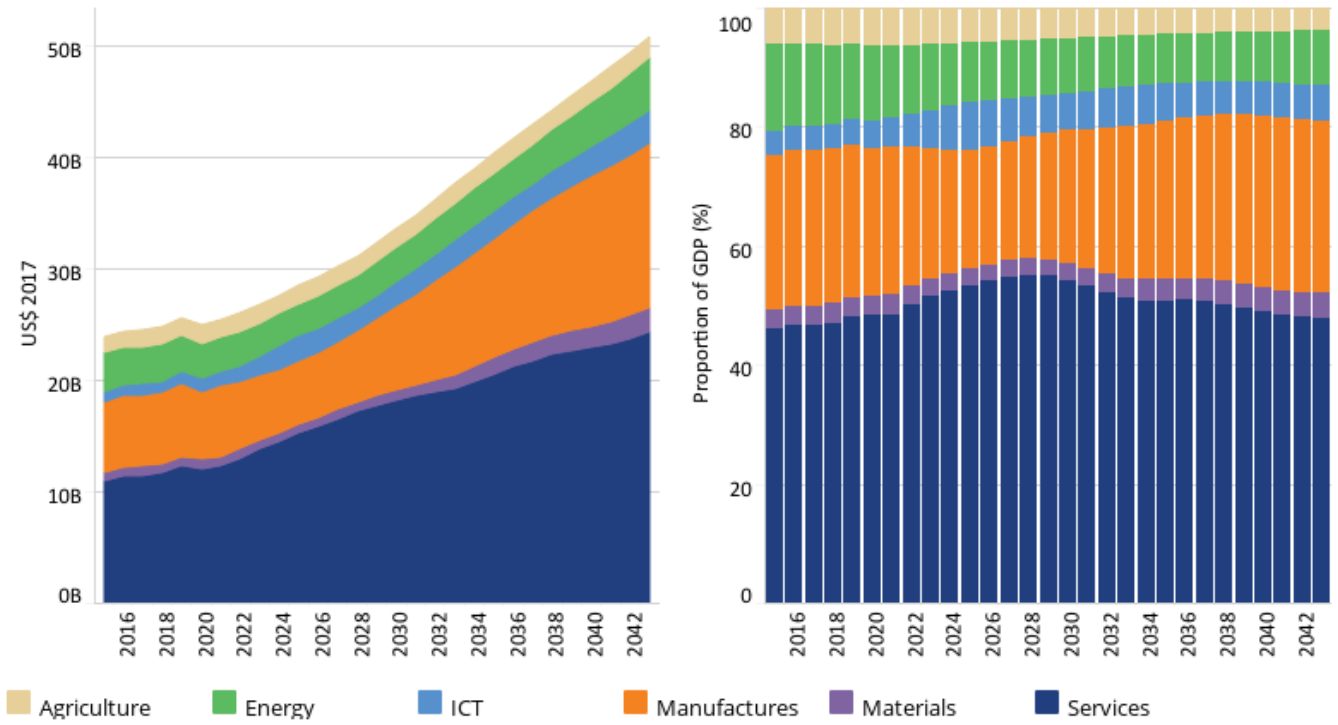⊞ View on Tableau Public ↺ ↻ ↺ ↪ ▼ | ⬇▼ ⬚ ⦚ Share

In 2019, Gabon's informal sector contributed approximately 33% to GDP, the highest share among its upper middle-income peer economies in Africa. In Botswana, which ranks second, the informal sector accounts for only 18.7% of GDP, and the group's average is 14%.

By 2043, Gabon's informal sector is forecast to account for 28.9% of GDP, likely reflecting improvements in overall state capacity, including for taxation and higher incomes. However, in oil-exporting economies such as Gabon, the link between higher incomes and better governance is typically weaker than in non-oil dependent economies.

Chart 8: Value added by sector in CP, 2015–2043
Billions US$ 2017 and % of GDP

Gabon ▼

Agriculture Energy ICT Manufactures Materials Services

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

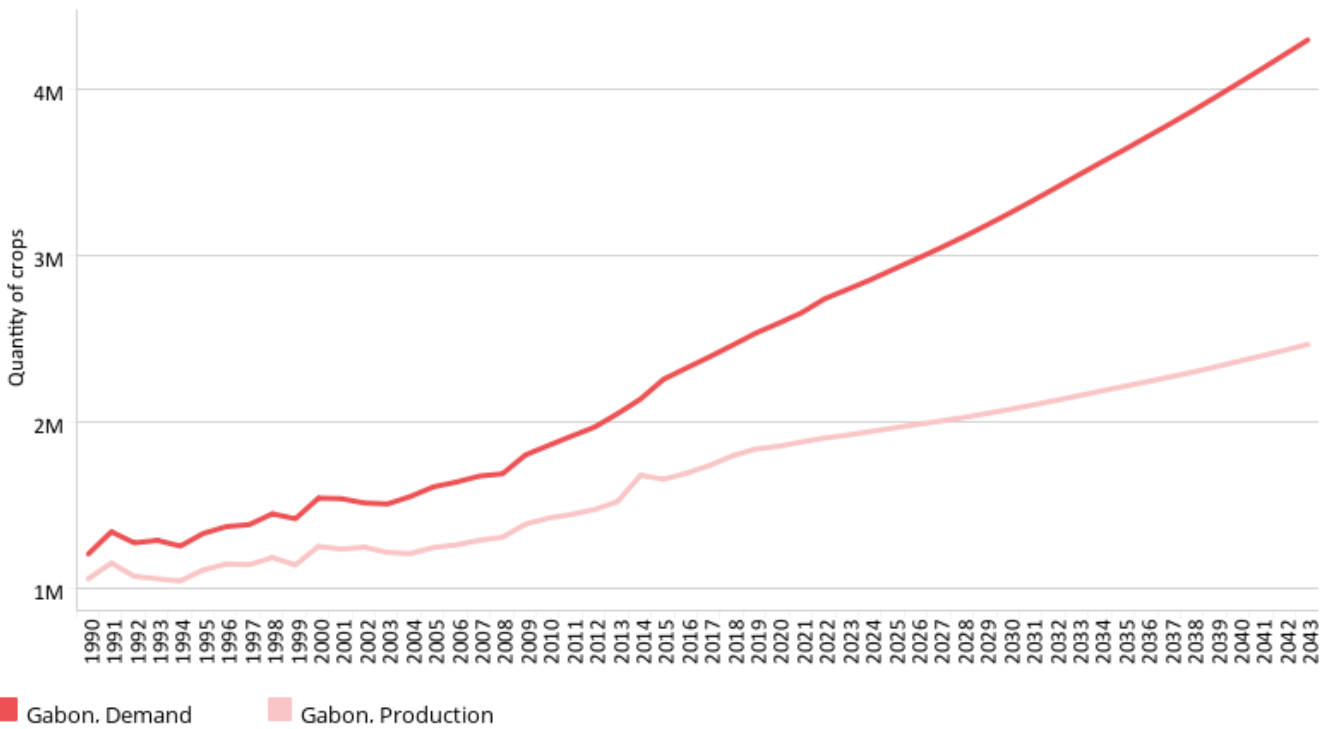⁑ View on Tableau Public ↶ ↷ ↺ ↪ ▾ | 🖵 ▾ 🔲 ⸰⸰⸰ Share

The IFs platform uses data from the Global Trade and Analysis Project (GTAP) to classify economic activity into six sectors: agriculture, energy, materials (including mining), manufactures, services and information and communications technology (ICT). Most other sources use a threefold distinction between only agriculture, industry and services with the result that data may differ.

In 2019, Gabon's service sector accounted for 46% of GDP, the equivalent of US$12.3 billion, followed by manufactures, which represented about 26.1% (US$6.2 billion). Agriculture contributed US$1.4 billion, representing 6.1% of GDP, followed by energy at 14.8% (US$3.5 billion). In the future, the service sector is expected to remain the most important contributor to Gabon's GDP, forecast to account for 48% of GDP by 2043 at a value of US$24.4 billion. The manufacturing sector is also expected to remain more or less at 2019 levels (28% of GDP; US$14.7 billion). The contribution of the energy sector is forecast to drop to 9.3% of GDP (US$4.7 billion).

Chart 9: Agriculture production/demand in CP, 1990–2043
Crops million tons

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■ Gabon. Demand   ■ Gabon. Production

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from Food and Agriculture Organization Food Balance Sheets

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The data on agricultural production and demand in the IFs forecasting platform initialises from data provided on food balances by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). IFs contains data on numerous types of agriculture but aggregates its forecast into crops, meat and fish, presented in million metric tons. Chart 9 shows agricultural production and demand as a total of all three categories.

In 2019, Gabon's crop yield was 1.8 million metric tons per hectare. It is expected to increase to 2.5 million metric tons per hectare by 2043.

Gabon's agricultural production does not meet its current domestic demand, which stood at 2.5 million metric tons in 2019. The current gap of almost 0.7 million metric tons is expected to increase to 1.8 million metric tons by 2043. Population growth is fuelling agricultural demand.
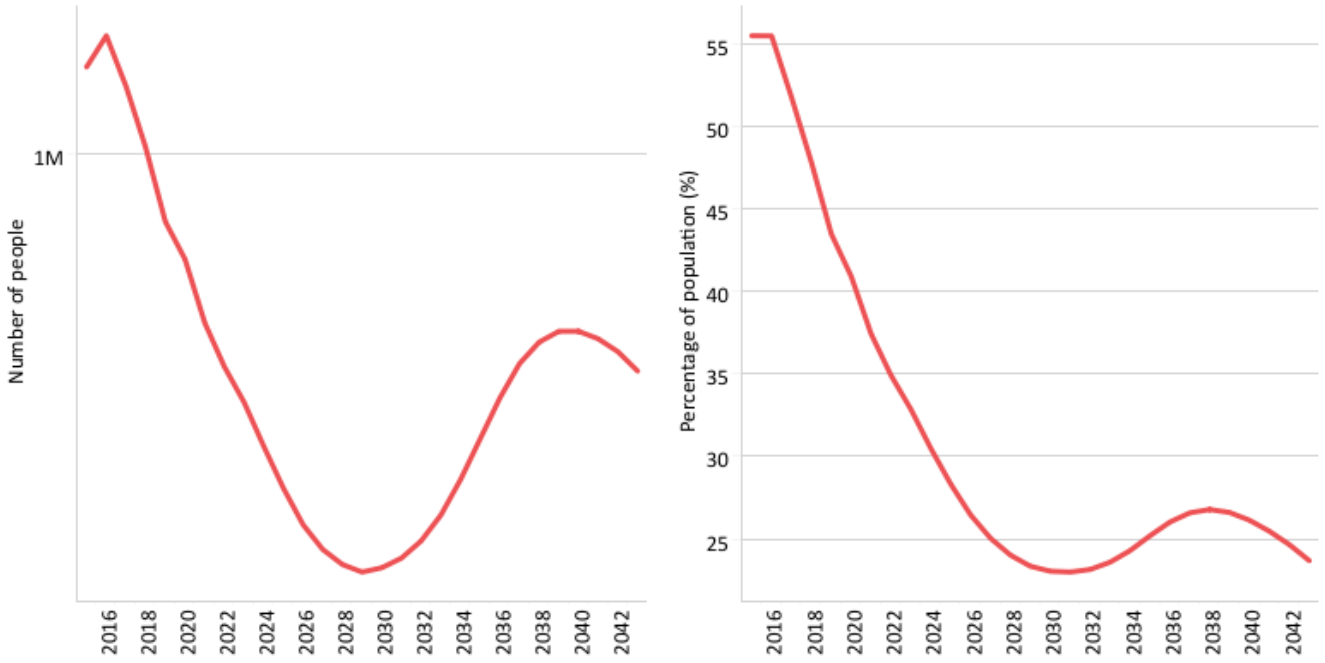
Poverty: Current Path

Chart 10: Poverty in CP, 2015–2043
Millions of people and % of total population

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■ Gabon

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division Population Prospects estimate, World Development Indicators population data and PovcalNet World Bank data.

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There are numerous methodologies and approaches to defining poverty. We measure income poverty and use GDP per capita as a proxy. In 2015, the World Bank adopted the measure of US$1.90 per person a day (in 2011 international prices), also used to measure progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 1 of eradicating extreme poverty. To account for extreme poverty in richer countries occurring at slightly higher levels of income than in poor countries, the World Bank introduced three additional poverty lines in 2017:

· US$3.20 for lower middle-income countries

· US$5.50 for upper middle-income countries

· US$22.70 for high-income countries.

As an upper middle-income country, Gabon uses the US$5.50 benchmark to define extreme poverty. The country's poverty burden is high considering its GDP per capita. In 2019, 43.5% of the population was living below the poverty line, corresponding to 940 000 people. However, Gabon's poverty rate lies 2.4 percentage points below the average of its upper middle-income peer group on the continent (45.91%).

On the Current Path, the number of people living in extreme poverty in Gabon will drop to 800 000 people by 2043,

representing a poverty rate of 23.7%. This is a reduction of more than 45 percentage points. The average African upper middle-income country will have a poverty rate of 39.7% by 2043. In 2019, Gabon had the fourth highest poverty rate among Africa's upper middle-income economies.
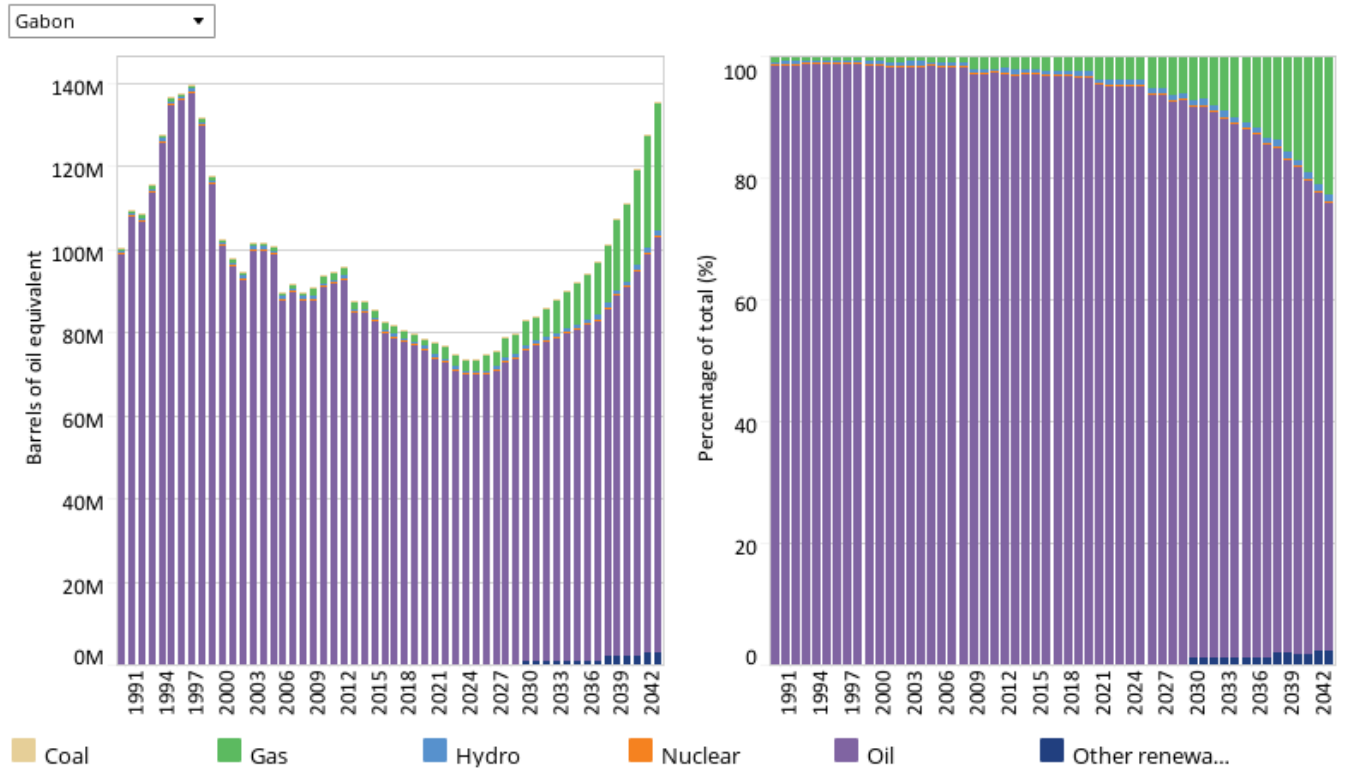
Chart 11: Energy production by type in CP, 1990–2043
Barrels of oil equivalent and % of energy production

Gabon

Legend: Coal | Gas | Hydro | Nuclear | Oil | Other renewa…

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from World Energy Outlook data

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The IFs platform forecasts six types of energy, namely oil, gas, coal, hydro, nuclear and other renewables. To allow comparisons between different types of energy, the data is converted into billion barrels of oil equivalent (BOE). The energy contained in a barrel of oil is approximately 5.8 million British thermal units (MBTUs) or 1 700 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy.

In 2019, Gabon's total energy production was about 99 million barrels of oil, estimated to increase marginally to 100 million barrels by 2043. The country's current energy mix is heavily reliant on oil, which accounted for over 99% of total production in 2019. In 2043, it will still account for 74%, with gas making up the rest.

Chart 12: Carbon emissions in CP, 1990–2043
Million tons of carbon (note, not CO₂ equivalent)

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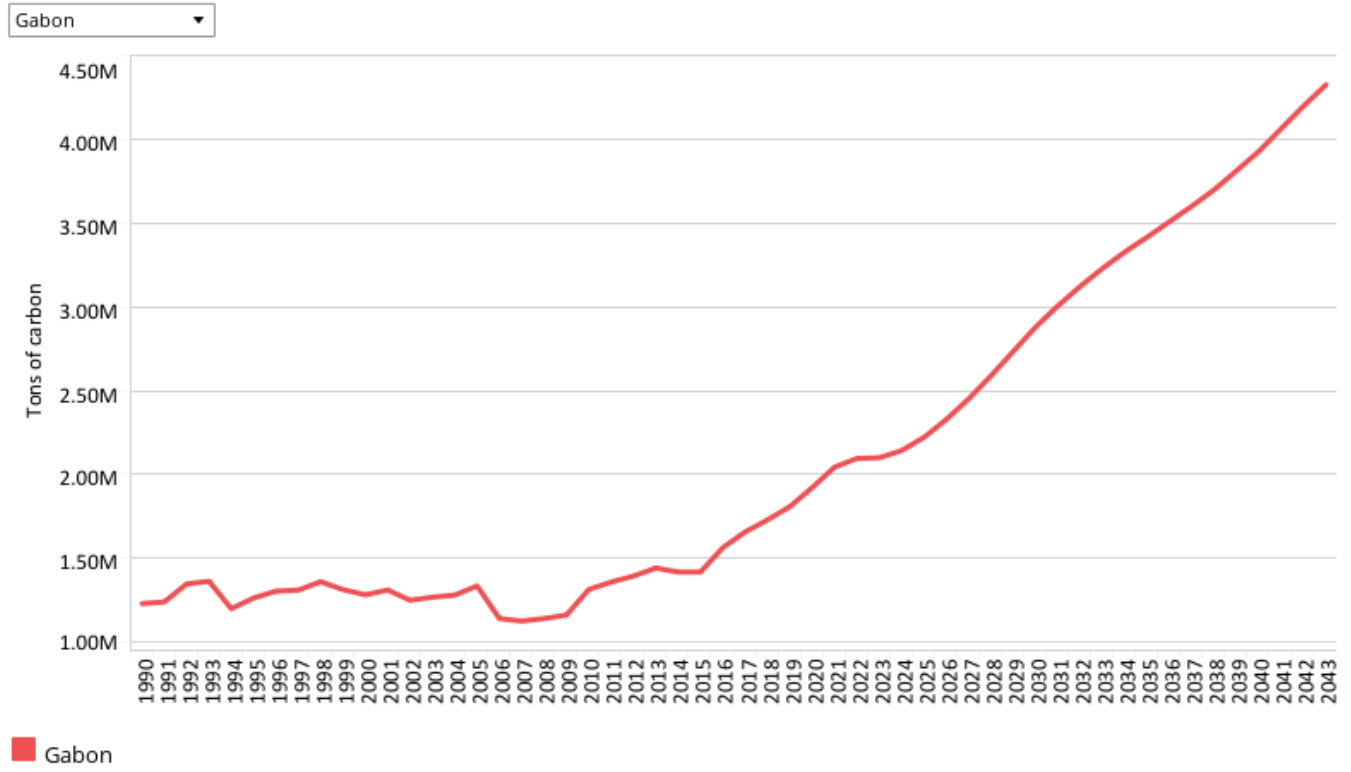
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center data

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Carbon is released in many ways, but the three most important contributors to greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (CO2), carbon monoxide (CO) and methane (CH4). Since each has a different molecular weight, IFs uses carbon. Many other sites and calculations use CO2 equivalent.

Gabon emitted 1.8 million tons of carbon in 2019. Carbon emissions are forecast to increase to 4.3 million tons by 2043.

Endnotes

1. Wold Atlas, Ecological regions of Gabon.

2. Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Gabon.

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Cite this research

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Mustapha Jobarteh joined the ISS in January 2022 as a Senior Researcher in the African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. Before joining ISS, Mustapha was a senior lecturer and Head of the Department of Economics and Finance at the University of the Gambia and a research fellow with the Center for Policy, Research and Strategic Studies. His interests include macroeconomics, international trade and econometric modelling. Mustapha has a PhD in economics from Istanbul Medeniyet
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