

El Hadj Omar Bongo



Passion or Profession: President

Period: 1935–

Bongo received military training abroad before returning to his homeland upon Gabon's independence in 1960. He held posts in President Leon M'ba's administration, including vice president. When M'ba died in 1967, Bongo succeeded him to the presidency. He converted to Islam in 1973, changed his first name to Omar, and adopted the Islamic title El Hadj (meaning one who has made a pilgrimage to Makkah). Bongo presided over a one-party state until multiparty elections were held in the early 1990s. He was reelected in 1993 and 1998. In 2003, Gabon's parliament amended the constitution to eliminate presidential term limits, which may allow Bongo to remain president for life.