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IVORY COASTS' 2025 ELECTIONS

Procedural and undemocratic



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-political dynamics surrounding Côte d'Ivoire's October 2025 presidential election and the historical factors that shaped its outcome which resulted in the re-election of Alassane Ouattara for a fourth consecutive term, with an official vote share of 89.77%¹ and a voter turnout of approximately 50.1%.

These figures were validated by the Constitutional Council of Côte d'Ivoire following an election marked by the disqualification of several major opposition figures. The absence of Laurent Gbagbo of the Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI), Tidjane Thiam of the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), Guillaume Soro of Générations et Peuples Solidaires (GPS), and Charles Blé Goudé of Congrès Panafricain pour la Justice et l'Égalité des Peuples (COJEP) significantly reduced electoral competition. This exclusion led to calls for boycotts and civil disobedience from the opposition, who viewed the process as a civil coup.

The report emphasises that Ivorian politics has been dominated for three decades by the rivalry between Ouattara, Gbagbo, and the late Henri Konan Bédié. Their shifting alliances and historical grievances—particularly the concept of “Ivoirité” used to exclude opponents based on ethnic and regional origins—have repeatedly plunged the country into crisis, most notably the civil wars and post-electoral violence between 2002 and 2011. The 2025 election reflected a continuation of these patterns, where judicial mechanisms and constitutional interpretations were used to maintain power and sideline rivals.

A central driver of political instability was the interpretation of the 2016 Constitution. While the Constitution maintains a two-term limit, Ouattara's camp argued that the 2016 revision “reset the counters to zero,” making a third (2020) and fourth (2025) term legally permissible. The opposition and civil society vehemently contested the interpretation, viewing it as a violation of democratic principles and the spirit of the law.

The report also documents a tightening of political and civil freedoms. In the run up to the election, the government introduced restrictive legislation, which expanded investigative techniques like wiretapping and nighttime searches. Vague charges like disturbance of public order and undermining State security were frequently used to arrest activists, bloggers, and opposition members. Furthermore, the shift from a declaratory to a prior authorisation regime for public demonstrations effectively stifled the right to protest. Security forces carried out numerous arrests (more than 1,000), and the authorities issued decrees banning public demonstrations.² The 2025 electoral period saw a resurgence of violence, including attacks by unidentified masked men, abductions, and intercommunal clashes. Official reports recorded 11 deaths, 71 injuries,

¹ <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.ci/archives-et-decisions/decision-ndeg-ci-2025-ep-00704-11ccsg-du-04-novembre-2025-portant-proclamation>

² <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/presidential-elections-in-c%C3%B4te-divoire-hundreds-of-protesters-arrested-one-protester-killed-in-banned-opposition-protests/>

and 1,658 arrests. The climate was further poisoned by large-scale disinformation campaigns. These campaigns utilised decontextualised images and fake accounts to spread narratives of French interference, security collapses, and alleged election cancellations, often fueled by regional tensions with neighboring military juntas.

The 2025 election confirms the failure of national reconciliation and the absence of a consensual electoral framework. For Côte d'Ivoire to achieve lasting stability, it must prioritise inclusive political dialogue, reform the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), and foster a generational renewal of its political class to move beyond the dominance of the traditional three major leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The 2025 Ivorian presidential election on October 25, 2025 was a major event in the country's political landscape. The final list of approved candidates was composed of Alassane Ouattara of the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP)—the incumbent president and candidate for a fourth term; Jean-Louis Billon of the Democratic Congress (CODE); former First Lady Simone Gbagbo of the Movement of Capable Generations (MGC); Henriette Lagou Adjoua (Independent); and Aboua Don Mello (Independent).³

This election took place in a context marked by the absence of several opposition figures whose candidacies were rejected by the Constitutional Council. These included former President Laurent Gbagbo and Tidjane Thiam, the president of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). Within this framework, the Ouattara, was considered the clear favorite in the race.

Approximately 8.7 million⁴ Ivorians were registered for an election held in a tense political climate characterised by a lack of political dialogue, the arrest of opposition members, infringements on freedom of expression, and the proliferation of misinformation. Two key factors contributed to this political instability: the issue of the incumbent Ivorian president's candidacy for a fourth term, and the exclusion of opposition leaders. Alassane Ouattara was first elected in 2010⁵, then re-elected in 2015⁶ and 2020.⁷ His candidacy for a fourth term was made possible—according to his camp—by the

2016⁸ constitutional revision, which, in their interpretation, “reset the counters to zero.” The new candidacy sparked reactions of indignation and protest within the opposition, which considered it unconstitutional and a violation of democratic principles. Despite the controversy, Ouattara, aged 83, justified his candidacy by invoking the Constitution and his experience in addressing the security and economic challenges facing Côte d'Ivoire and the sub-region.⁹

The rejection of the main opposition candidates was based on judicial grounds and issues of nationality. Laurent Gbagbo was excluded due to a conviction handed down by the Ivorian judiciary. The former Ivorian president was convicted for the “robbery” of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) while he was in detention in The Hague and undergoing trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC)¹⁰ for crimes against humanity. Although acquitted by the ICC and released, his Ivorian conviction

3 <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.ci/archives-et-decisions/decision-ndeg-ci-2025-ep-00608-09ccsg-du-08-septembre-2025-portant-publication>

4 <https://cei.ci/point-de-presse-relatif-a-larret-de-la-liste-electorale-definitive-2025/>

5 <https://press.un.org/fr/2010/cs10102.doc.htm>

6 <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMElection?codePays=CIV&dateElection=CIV20151025&codeInstitution=3>

7 <https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/11723918-alassane-ouattara-reelu-en-cotedivoire-pour-un-3e-mandat-controverse.html>

8 <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02285475/document>

9 <https://www.ifri.org/fr/presse-contenus-repris-sur-le-site/extension-du-terrorisme-jihadiste-sahelien-en-afrique-de-louest>

10 <https://www.icc-cpi.int/fr/cdi/gbagbo-goude>

remains valid. Tidjane Thiam's ineligibility was based on a question of nationality. The prohibition of dual nationality was invoked at the time of his registration on the electoral list, even though he subsequently renounced his French nationality.¹¹ Exclusion and the lack of dialogue are two recurring problems in Ivorian politics and have led the country in the past to numerous crises, such as the one that occurred between 2002 and 2011. The crisis began with an attempted coup which degenerated into a civil war and ethnic tension. Despite the intervention of the United Nations and a peace deal tensions continued resulting in a second civil war during the period. The northern part of the country was held by rebels for a long period.¹²

All the crises that Côte d'Ivoire experienced up to 2011 are the result of political disputes among three major parties that dominated the political scene. The Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), the Rally of Republicans (RDR), and the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) have shaped the country's history through tensions and political realignments since the 1990s. Their rivalry, temporary alliances, and periods of confrontation have structured the country's recent history, influencing socio-political crises, electoral dynamics, and power realignments at the top of the state. The PDCI plays the role of the historical party. As heir to Houphouët-Boigny's party, it governed as a single party between 1960 and 1990. It positions itself as a moderate and centrist party. Attached to stability, diplomacy, and traditional Houphouëtism¹³, it led Côte d'Ivoire to independence in 1960. With the opening to multiparty politics, it faced new forces challenging its historical hegemony.

The first opposition party—openly left-wing—to challenge the PDCI was the FPI. Founded by Laurent Gbagbo, the FPI embodied, from the 1980s–1990s onward, an ideological opposition to the PDCI, claiming socialism

and a break with the Houphouëtist system. It was the PDCI's main adversary during the first decade of multiparty politics. The RDR was created in 1994 from an internal split within the PDCI around Djéni Kobinan¹⁴ and later Alassane Ouattara. This rupture led to a lasting fracture within the political class, reshaping alliances. The RDR quickly became a liberal opposition party supported by part of the youth and the population of the North. The disputes that erupted between the PDCI and the FPI represent the founding rivalry of multiparty politics. At the beginning of the multiparty era, between 1990 and 1999, the PDCI faced a combative FPI. The tensions opposing conservatives and socialists revolved around the pace of democratisation of the PDCI regime—deemed too slow by the FPI—public freedoms, and political pluralism. This period was marked by demonstrations and arrests of FPI leaders, but also by a gradual rise of multi-party politics under social and international pressure. During this period, the FPI and the RDR even drew closer to forming an alliance: the Republican Front.

After the 1999 coup d'État that overthrew the PDCI, the FPI came to power in 2000. A new rivalry then emerged, this time between the FPI and the RDR. The crisis between the FPI and the RDR arose around the 2000 presidential election. Alassane Ouattara's candidacy was invalidated for reasons of "Ivoirité," which the RDR interpreted as political exclusion. This decision fractured the national political landscape and fueled lasting resentment between the FPI and the RDR. The attempted coup of September 19, 2002, which turned into an armed rebellion, further intensified this rivalry. It pitted an FPI government, supported by the regular army, against the rebellion of the Forces Nouvelles, perceived as close to the RDR. This period deepened ethnic, regional, and political divisions. It resulted in a de facto partition of the country until successive peace

11 <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250604-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-quatre-personnalit%C3%A9s-de-l-opposition-d%C3%A9finitivement-exclues-de-la-pr%C3%A9sidentielle>

12 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13287585><https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13287585>

13 <https://shs.cairn.info/felix-houphouet-et-la-cote-d-ivoire--9782865371044-page-269>

14 <https://fr.scribd.com/document/845188860/DJENI-KOBENAN-PERE-FONDATEUR-DU-RDR>

agreements were reached. During the 2010 elections, the PDCI and the RDR “reconciled” and established a strategic alliance of rupture: the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). This alliance, created to stabilise the country and consolidate a shared electoral base, brought Alassane Ouattara to power.

These political disputes did not prevent Côte d'Ivoire from making economic progress. Each political party that came to power sought to leave its mark on the country's economic development. While Houphouët-Boigny achieved the first Ivorian economic miracle, his successor Henri Konan Bédié implemented a strategic development plan centered on the “12 Works of the Elephant of Africa.” The December 1999 coup d'État did not allow the PDCI to carry out this development plan, but some projects announced since the 1990s were executed or completed by President Alassane Ouattara between 2011 and 2024. Côte d'Ivoire entered 2025 with strong macro-economic momentum and relative political stability.

It escaped the wave of military coups that shook its neighbors (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea). The country confirmed its dynamism with real GDP growth estimated between 6.2% and 6.3% in 2025, according to the World Bank and the African Development Bank. This performance was higher than the regional average (West Africa: ~4.5%) and continues the trend of previous years (6.1% in 2024). Inflation remained relatively low and under control in 2025, close to 1% to 3% depending on the month and national indicators.¹⁵ International observers were unanimous: Côte d'Ivoire recorded continuous growth for more than ten years, but the unequal distribution of the country's wealth remained a risk factor as the country entered a new electoral cycle.

This report analyses the role of the 2025 elections in increasing political instability and reversing democratic gains. It explains Ouattara's centralisation of power, deepening economic inequalities, rising corruption, and political exclusion.

15 https://www.anstat.ci/assets/publications/files/Chiffres_Cles_CIV_2025.pdf

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE LONG MARCH TOWARDS PEACE

When the first Ivorian president Félix Houphouët-Boigny¹⁶ died in 1993, he left behind a country that was relatively stable and economically prosperous. However, the succession¹⁷ war that broke out between the then President of the National Assembly, Henri Konan Bédié, and Houphouët-Boigny's last Prime Minister, Alassane Ouattara, led to a progressive escalation of socio-political tensions.

The concept of “Ivoirité”¹⁸, aimed at defining who was Ivorian, laid the groundwork for Ouattara's exclusion and intensified the division between Ivorians from the North and those from the South. Emerging in the 1990s, “Ivoirité”¹⁹ was rapidly politicised and contributed to the exacerbation of an already latent identity and regional divide. Initially presented to promote national culture, it was diverted to exclude opponents and legitimise the ruling power, particularly against Ouattara. In this context of political competition, the concept evolved into an ideology distinguishing “indigenous Ivorians” from Ivorians of internal or cross-border migration.²⁰ Ouattara then ceased to be a mere political name and became a symbol of Ivorians excluded due to their ethnic origin. He became the central target of Ivoirité: accusations circulated about his supposed “Burkinabé origins” and the contested nationality of his father. In 2000, the new Constitution required that any presidential candidate be born of Ivorian father and mother, explicitly eliminating Ouattara from the presidential race. He was thus prevented from running several times (notably in 1995 and 2000). This exclusion reinforced his

image as a leader of the “left-behind” and crystallised deep resentment in the North of the country.

Laurent Gbagbo came to power on October 26, 2000, as a providential man and left-wing reformer. As a historic opponent preferred to the military, his political ascension was seen as the culmination of a long struggle for multiparty democracy, against a backdrop of identity crisis, institutional tensions, and growing instability in Côte d'Ivoire. A few weeks before his accession, on December 24, 1999²¹, a military coup led by General Robert Guéï overthrew President Bédié²², marking the first coup in the country's history. The military cited the growing unpopularity of Bédié's regime, economic tensions, and unrest within the army. General Guéï promised a brief transition and “free and transparent” elections, but he soon appeared to want to retain power. The Supreme Court, under the influence of the military regime, disqualified several major candidates, including Ouattara (RDR), who was still a victim of the concept of “Ivoirité”, as well as the ousted President Henri Konan Bédié. Only Laurent Gbagbo and a few minor candidates

16 https://www.persee.fr/doc/oultre_1631-0438_2010_num_97_368_4512

17 <https://www.universalis-edu.com/evenement/7-15-decembre-1993-mort-et-succession-du-president-felix-houphouet-boigny>

18 <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-etudes-2001-3-page-292?lang=fr>

19 <https://gerflint.fr/Base/Afriqueouest3/boa.pdf>

20 <https://hal.science/hal-00445531/document>

21 <https://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMEve/756>

22 <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2000-1-page-117?lang=fr>

were ultimately allowed to run. Robert Guéï also ran for office. On October 22, 2000, Gbagbo appeared to be far ahead according to provisional results. Guéï attempted to maintain power by declaring himself the winner, triggering massive demonstrations and clashes between civilians and the military. Faced with popular mobilisation in favor of Gbagbo, the military relinquished power.²³

Laurent Gbagbo inherited a divided and economically weakened country. Upon his arrival, Gbagbo attempted to reconcile Ivorians through a bold initiative. A few months after his accession, while the political climate remained marked by deep divisions, he launched the National Reconciliation Forum. This forum aimed to restore social cohesion and initiate a lasting exit from the crisis. Organized by a commission chaired by Prime Minister Affi N'Guessan, with the participation of experts, political representatives, and members of civil society, it brought together the main political figures for hearings and public debates. Associations, religious organisations, traditional leaders, and trade unions also participated, emphasizing the national and inclusive character of the initiative. This forum represented the first institutional attempt to bring together all the country's active forces after a period of deep fractures.²⁴

However, the recommendations were not implemented and did not prevent the crisis of 2002. The failure of Gbagbo's regime to stabilise the country was therefore mainly linked to the legacy of longstanding socio-identity tensions rather than solely by his political decisions.

To understand the depth of the 2002 armed crisis, it is necessary to look back at the structural factors accumulated since the 1990s. Latent tensions provided fertile ground for a coup attempt in 2002²⁵, which turned

into a civil war, resulting in the country's partition between 2002 and 2007. The rebels controlling the North and part of the West grouped under the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), then into the New Forces (FN), commanded by Guillaume Soro. In the South, Laurent Gbagbo governed the country, with at the center a Ceasefire Line bordered by a Zone of Confidence (ZDC), monitored by international forces (French Licorne Force and UNOCI peacekeepers). Over the course of military clashes and successive peace agreements, Côte d'Ivoire reached the Ouagadougou Agreements²⁶ (2007) signed by Gbagbo and Soro.

The war resulted from a complex interplay of political, economic, identity, and social factors accumulated over several decades. The question of nationality, politically instrumentalised, and the exclusion of certain populations by the 2000 Constitution weakened national unity. This fueled deep resentment in the North and contributed to making Ouattara a central figure for the New Forces. When the rebellion broke out in 2002, its main leaders, headed by Guillaume Soro, took up political and identity claims: the exclusion of Ivorians from the North, the concept of "Ivoirité", restrictions on political participation, democratic backsliding, and contestation of Gbagbo's election. The New Forces' claims overlapped in several respects with those of Ouattara's RDR. Soro's New Forces saw in Ouattara an ally and a political leader capable of embodying an alternative to Gbagbo. Soro and Ouattara were not in a relationship of subordination but in a political and military cooperation based on the convergence of their claims. Identity issues, particularly surrounding nationality, fueled a climate of mistrust extending across the country. In certain regions and communities, access to land and land disputes also became catalysts for conflict, especially in areas inhabited by migrant or naturalised

23 https://www.hrw.org/news/2000/12/20/election-violence-abidjanhttps://digitallibrary.un.org/record/757205/files/CCPR_C_CIV_1-EN.pdf

24 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/757205/files/CCPR_C_CIV_1-EN.pdf

25 <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/doc/etpays/Afsubsah/AfsubsahDoc5.htm>

26 https://www.afri-ct.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/42_Alain_Handy_Charles_Ouaga.pdf

populations settled for generations but often considered “foreigners.” Cross-border alliances and the implicit support of neighboring countries (Burkina Faso, Liberia, Guinea) prolonged the conflict.

At the end of the war, disarmament, reunification, and the organisation of the 2010 presidential election were key elements to resolve the Ivorian crisis. The 2010 election, postponed several times and supposed to mark the end of the crisis, nevertheless led to an armed conflict. Ivorians, exhausted by years of war, were eager to vote and restore stability. The simultaneous participation of the three main leaders represented a historic event, marking the first confrontation between Gbagbo, Ouattara, and Bédié, and eliminating any return to the narrative of “Ivoirité.” The UN played a central role through the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), deploying over 6,000 peacekeepers (up to 11,792 at the peak of the 2011 crisis), ensuring electoral logistics (transport of sensitive material, technical support to the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), training of political actors and civil society, social cohesion campaigns, establishment of secure compilation centers) and certifying the vote. Special Representative Choi Young-Jin verified the credibility of the process at every stage, preventing disputes and reinforcing confidence in the results.

After the first round²⁷, three leaders emerged: Gbagbo (FPI) 38.04%, Ouattara (RDR) 32.07%, and Bédié (PDCI-RDA) 25.24%. Each embodied a different era and vision of Côte d’Ivoire. Gbagbo, the incumbent president and populist, relied on the South, Center-West, and mountainous West, representing the man of the people, contested by the international community but supported by his followers. Ouattara, a symbol of the fight against “Ivoirité,” benefited from support in the North and from naturalised Ivorians and maintained an implicit closeness with the

rebellion controlling the North. Bédié, former president and leader of the Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), retained the electorate of the Grand Centre, considered the “kingmaker” despite his third-place finish in the first round.

Ouattara and Bédié, historically rivals, came together and created the Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes for Democracy and Peace (RHDP), supporting Ouattara’s candidacy in the second round. Gbagbo’s refusal to relinquish power despite international recognition of Ouattara’s victory triggered an intense political and military crisis.²⁸ Gbagbo justified his refusal to accept the results due to massive fraud in the North, still under control of the New Forces, deemed close to Ouattara. Despite peace agreements, the rebellion had not yet fully disarmed. Côte d’Ivoire was unified on paper, but in reality, the North remained under the control of Guillaume Soro and his men. Gbagbo denounced “international interference” and the contested impartiality of UNOCI and the certifier. His accusations targeted France, accused of attempting to overthrow him by force; the United States, presented as supporting Ouattara; and the UN, whose presence in the country was increasingly contested through marches and sit-ins at its premises. He thus positioned himself as the defender of Ivorian sovereignty against what he considered external pressures. Gbagbo’s supporters, notably the “Young Patriots,” voiced themselves in public media and in the streets, alleging an “international plot.” Ouattara’s camp claimed that Gbagbo was trying to confiscate a victory officially recognised by the international community. The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) declared Ouattara the winner, but the Constitutional Council invalidated these results and proclaimed Gbagbo the winner. Two presidents were sworn in within the same country: Gbagbo controlled Abidjan and the South, Ouattara was internationally recognised (UN, AU, ECOWAS) and supported

27 <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2010/11/201162>

28 <https://grotius.fr/ionu-et-la-crise-post-electorale-ivoirienne-dans-les-meandres-dune-intervention-sur-fond-de-contestation-2/>

by the New Forces—renamed Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI)—in the North.²⁹

The war resumed and ended on April 11, 2011³⁰, with the arrest of Gbagbo by the FRCI, with the support of French forces.³¹ The post-electoral crisis officially caused over 3,000 deaths (according to the National Inquiry Commission) and triggered a massive exodus of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Liberia and Ghana, where emergency camps were established to meet basic needs. Thousands of people crossed the Cavally River on improvised canoes to reach Liberia. In Ghana, Ivorian families fleeing the South and especially Abidjan crossed the border to take refuge in the Brong Ahafo region or in the capital Accra for the wealthier. Estimates from humanitarian organisations and the UN system reported over 150,000 Ivorians³² who left Côte d'Ivoire between December 2010 and April 2011. Refugees feared political reprisals and intercommunal clashes orchestrated by militias and uncontrolled armed men. Liberian and Ghanaian authorities, already facing limited internal resources, were quickly overwhelmed by these massive arrivals. The return to political stability³³ in Côte d'Ivoire encouraged refugees to return home in successive waves. However, some Ivorians, fearing for their lives, remained in camps, such as Ampain³⁴ in Ghana, which was not completely emptied over the years.

PEACE UNDER STRAIN FROM 2011 TO 2020

Ouattara's accession to power in May 2011 marked the end of a decade of crisis and the beginning of a new era.³⁵ The Ivorian political environment between 2011 and 2020 was a period of reconstruction following the post-electoral crisis, characterised by the consolidation of President Ouattara's (ADO) power, strong economic growth, but also persistent challenges related to reconciliation and growing political tensions linked to elections.

The first decade of governance under the Ouattara regime is fairly contrasted. Between 2011 and 2020, the image of undeniable economic success, with improved infrastructure and renewed investor confidence, stands alongside major political challenges, with a state perceived as increasingly centralised. The use of single-source procurement contracts raised the specter of an economic recovery designed to favor the rise of a political clan, the RHDP. The elevation of the concept of "ethnic catch-up"³⁶ fueled fears of another identity-based drift similar to "ivoirité." The regime was accused of promoting Northern elites through ministerial appointments, senior positions in the army, and high-level posts in the public administration.

29 See *Pourquoi je suis devenu rebelle. La Côte d'Ivoire au bord du gouffre*. Guillaume Soro. Hachettes Littératures. Paris 2005. 173 pages.

30 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/04/11/a-abidjan-une-arrestation-dans-une-ambiance-electrique_1506159_3212.html

31 <https://theses.fr/2017NANT2054>

32 <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/actualites/briefing-notes/le-nombre-des-ivoiriens-exiles-dans-les-pays-voisins-atteint-150-000>

33 <https://fr.scribd.com/document/862419958/La-Cote-Divoire-Au-Lendemain-de-La-Crise-Post-Electorale-Entre-Sortie-de-Crise-Politique-Et-Defis-Securitaires>

34 <https://www.linodrome.com/enquete-exclusive/110602-ivoiriens-refugies-au-ghana-survivre-un-defi-perpetuel-avant-le-retour-au-pays-reportage>

35 <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-securite-et-strategie-2011-3-page-22?lang=fr>

36 <https://ivoirediaspo.net/le-pdci-accuse-ouattara-de-rattrapage-ethnique-repli-identitaire-et-gabegie/28987.html/>

The functioning of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), long contested by the opposition, having been the subject of numerous criticisms, to which the regime paid little attention. The CEI was considered unbalanced, in favor of those in power, indirectly consecrating a form of return to single-party rule. One of the most sensitive issues of the period remained the handling of justice related to the 2010–2011 crisis. While all investigations highlighted the responsibility of both camps involved in the post-electoral conflict, several actors from the Gbagbo camp were arrested, tried, or forced into exile.³⁷ Very few figures from the Ouattara camp were prosecuted, despite allegations of abuses raised by international organisations. This one-sided justice, or victor's justice, was regularly denounced as a major obstacle to national reconciliation. The successive dialogue or truth commissions did not succeed in fully easing memory-related tensions. Despite the persistent political tensions and institutional criticism, the authorities nonetheless sought to restore state authority and stabilise the country from a security standpoint.

Alongside the gradual consolidation of political power, the Ouattara regime pursued a strategy of national security stabilisation and economic recovery. One of the priorities of the decade was to restore state sovereignty over the entire territory, which was achieved militarily after the fall of Gbagbo. Under the leadership of the Ouattara government, Côte d'Ivoire experienced a "second Ivorian miracle,"³⁸ according to some experts, with strong economic growth (often around 8% per year), thanks to massive infrastructure investments and the return of investor confidence. The 2016 Constitution was adopted, with the aim of framing future elections and resolving certain political issues inherited from previous crises. This reconstruction dynamic was nevertheless

accompanied by a controversial institutional reform process, whose modalities quickly sparked strong criticism.

The constitutional reform aimed at removing problematic articles from the fundamental law was presented by Ouattara as an instrument of institutional modernisation. The promise to adopt a text intended to definitively turn the page on the repeated political crises since 2002 was also presented as an additional argument.³⁹ However, the method of its drafting laid the groundwork for contestation of the text. A committee of experts selected by the executive branch (under the authority of the president) drafted the new Constitution. The text was submitted to a referendum without in-depth public debate, a fact denounced by civil society and opposition parties. This process automatically recalled the 2000 Constitution, tailor-made by the military authorities in power to benefit from total amnesty after their period of rule. Opponents of the constitutional reform project called for broader political dialogue around the text, transparent national consultation, and a longer timeframe to explain the merits of the reform to citizens. Despite these criticisms, Ivorians were called to the polls for the referendum. Voter turnout stood at around 42.42%, leading the opposition to claim that the text had neither received popular support nor national approval. The electoral map⁴⁰ revealed a high mobilisation rate in the North but low voter participation in the South and Western regions. The reform was adopted with 93.42% of the vote.

Beyond institutional debates, the judicial handling of the post-electoral crisis remained one of the main fault lines in the national reconciliation process. The judicial treatment of the actors involved in the 2010–2011 crisis was a sensitive issue. Former President Laurent Gbagbo and his last Minister of Youth,

37 https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RelatedRecords/CR2015_04731.PDF

38 <https://www.imf.org/fr/news/articles/2015/09/28/04/53/sp010713>

39 <https://media-files.abidjan.net/document/docs/document-constitution1.pdf>

40 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/370648/politique/referendum-cote-divoire-resultats-taux-de-participation-region-region/>

Charles Blé Goudé, were transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Gbagbo was prosecuted by the ICC for his role in the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis. For the first time in the history of the ICC, a former head of state was transferred and tried in The Hague.⁴¹ The former Ivorian president was described as an “indirect co-perpetrator” of several crimes. His judicial case rested on multiple charges of crimes against humanity. Acts of murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, and other inhumane acts were retained against Laurent Gbagbo.⁴² The prosecution’s case was built around five incidents that occurred mainly between December 2010 and April 2011. These include the repression of opposition marches in Abidjan, the killing of women demonstrators in Abobo, violence during the attack on RTI, the shelling of neighborhoods in Abobo, and violence committed during the retreat of pro-Gbagbo forces along the coastal strip and in the western mountainous regions. Gbagbo was never accused of personally committing these crimes. The ICC, through the Office of the Prosecutor, reproached him for having exercised control over the forces that allegedly committed them, hence the accusation based on a “common plan” aimed at retaining power by all means.

While the Gbagbo camp faced Ivorian and international justice, the Ouattara camp was not subjected to prosecution. Many former rebels were promoted within the army, creating a perception of two-tier justice. Gbagbo was not the only actor of the “refoundation regime” targeted by national and international justice. His last Minister of Youth and leader of the “Young Patriots,” Charles Blé Goudé, was arrested in Ghana in 2013 and transferred to The Hague in 2014. He was tried alongside Gbagbo for crimes against humanity.⁴³ Gbagbo’s wife, born Simone Ehivet, was the subject of another

ICC arrest warrant.⁴⁴ Abidjan refused her transfer, considering that national justice was capable of judging her. Other political figures close to Gbagbo were also prosecuted. Former Minister of Budget Justin Katinan Koné faced accusations of “economic crimes.” Former Minister of the Civil Service Hubert Oulaye was convicted and later acquitted on appeal for complicity in the murder of UN peacekeepers in 2012. Former Minister of Construction Assoa Adou, incarcerated for several years, was released in 2017. Beyond political figures, several high-ranking officers who supported Gbagbo were subjected to trials. Former commander of the Republican Guard, General Dogbo Blé Bruno, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the kidnapping and murder of a senior officer. His lawyers have consistently denounced what they termed a political trial. Former commander of the Security Operations Command Center (CECOS), General Guiai Bi Poin, was indicted for abuses committed during the crisis. He later benefited from conditional release. Former commander of the Presidential Security Group (GSPR), Jean-Noël Abéhi, after his extradition from Ghana, was sentenced to ten years in prison for attempted destabilisation.

It was in this climate, marked both by apparent institutional stability and persistent political frustrations, that the 2015 presidential election was held. Ouattara was re-elected in the first round for a second term. The election, boycotted by part of the opposition—particularly Gbagbo’s Ivorian Popular Front (FPI)—had no effect in the face of the alliance between Henri Konan Bédié’s PDCI and Alassane Ouattara’s RDR, united within the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). On October 25, 2015, five years after the post-electoral crisis (2010–2011), Ivorians were once again called to the polls.

41 <https://www.icc-cpi.int/fr/news/les-juges-de-la-cpi-decident-que-laurent-gbagbo-est-apte-participer-aux-procedures>

42 <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/f7bf6722-c877-4227-add4-6099673493ce/Gbagbo-confirmation-day%208-fr-04102013.pdf>

43 <https://www.icc-cpi.int/fr/news/affaire-ble-goude-cloture-de-laudience-de-confirmation-des-charges-la-cpi>

44 <https://www.icc-cpi.int/fr/news/la-cpi-leve-les-scelles-sur-un-mandat-darret-lencontre-de-simone-gbagbo>

Peace and stability regained after ten years of civil war and political tension were to be consolidated. The fear of experiencing another electoral crisis was a sufficiently strong factor to allow the holding of a calm vote. The elections were considered low-stakes insofar as the country's two main political parties—the PDCI of Henri Konan Bédié and the RDR of Ouattara—were governing under the RHDP banner. This did not prevent contestation. Opposition parties and independent candidates brought back to the forefront long-standing political concerns, particularly the Independent Electoral Commission, deemed too favorable to the ruling party, and the need to update the electoral register. The applications of ten candidates were approved, including those of incumbent Ouattara and other nationally known political figures. Pascal Affi N'Guessan of the Ivorian Popular Front, Charles Konan Banny, former Prime Minister (independent), Amara Essy, former Minister of Foreign Affairs (independent), as well as Mamadou Koulibaly, former President of the National Assembly (LIDER), were in the race.

The vote proceeded generally calmly, although minor malfunctions were observed in several localities: delays in the opening of polling stations, malfunctioning identification tablets, or voters having difficulty locating their polling stations. International observers, including the African Union, ECOWAS, and the European Union, praised a calm and orderly electoral climate.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE MASKING OF PROBLEMS

The decade from 2011 to 2020 saw macroeconomic recovery and sustained growth for Côte d'Ivoire. After the 2011 crisis, the Ivorian economy experienced a strong rebound, posting one of the fastest real GDP growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. Real GDP grew by an average of 8.2% per year between

2012 and 2019, with a peak of 10.8% reached in 2013.⁴⁵ Even in the face of the global COVID-19 crisis, Côte d'Ivoire's economic activity recorded real growth of 1.7%⁴⁶, demonstrating a certain degree of resilience. This strong performance was a result of reconstruction efforts, massive infrastructure investments (major public works), and the implementation of successive National Development Plans (PNDs). However, the economic upswing did not mask the challenges of structural transformation and social inclusion, which were not resolved. Growth was not sufficiently inclusive, and inequalities remained significant, particularly between the capital Abidjan (which concentrates 80% of economic activity) and the rest of the country.

These macroeconomic performances also concealed deep fragilities in governance and anti-corruption efforts. This phenomenon, which continues to undermine the Ivorian economy, is not limited to the most visible practices, such as police racketeering on roads and transport routes, mandatory cash deposits before receiving care in public hospitals, or overpriced administrative services. Opaque allocations of public contracts, often to companies close to those in power, nepotism and clientelism—particularly in public recruitment or the granting of administrative authorisations—along with the embezzlement of public funds, are visible up to the highest levels of the state. Specific examples of these acts of corruption involving private or public companies have been widely reported. The Court of Auditors, in its report⁴⁷, revealed that the Ivorian state received only 878,713 CFA francs in passport fees, even though the unit cost of a passport is 40,000 CFA francs. This derisory amount barely represented the monthly salary of a senior civil servant in the Ivorian administration. Billions of CFA francs therefore disappeared without the Ministry of the

45 <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CI>

46 https://www.economie-ivoirienne.ci/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/inline-files/Comptes_nationaux_Annuels_2020.pdf

47 https://www.courdescomptes.ci/fichiers/1751494018RAPPORT%20COUR%20DES%20COMPTE%202024_19052025%20B_Site.pdf

Budget or the technical company responsible for producing the Ivorian passport (SNEDAI) being able to explain it.

Social sectors, essential to human development, have not escaped poor governance. The audit report of the Treichville University Hospital Center (CHU) revealed a dramatic drop in revenues between 2019 and 2020. The hospital was also cited for mismanagement of funds received from the state. Several state-owned enterprises led by executives affiliated with the ruling party, such as ANSUT, FER-PALMIER, and UTEXI, were accused of failing to repay state funds as required. The execution of the 2022 Finance Law resulted in a budget deficit of more than 3,000 billion CFA francs, while an excess amount of approximately 3,023 billion CFA francs remained unused.

Furthermore, in 2013, the awarding of contracts for the rehabilitation of universities, notably the University of Cocody, led to overbilling exceeding 110 billion CFA francs. In 2015, a scandal erupted over unpaid bonuses for members of the national football team following their victory at the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). The opaque management of a budget estimated at around 720 million CFA francs made newspaper headlines. The embezzlement of more than 400 billion CFA francs in the Presidential Emergency Program (PPU) led the World Bank to halt the program. One trillion CFA francs vanished at the Ivorian Petroleum Stock Management Company (GESTOCI). In the Abidjan metro construction project, the budget rose from 300 to 912 billion CFA francs without the government being able to provide a clear explanation. This corruption also affects the army, where officers have been convicted for drug trafficking involving seizures carried out by security services.

The cocoa sector, which underpins the Ivorian economy, remained plagued by producer poverty and the enrichment of multinational corporations.⁴⁸ Despite growth, poverty reduction has remained a major challenge. The poverty rate still stood at 37.2% in 2018. The economy also remained largely informal, representing more than half of GDP and the vast majority of jobs (over 90%).⁴⁹ Despite efforts to improve the business environment, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) remained relatively low as a share of GDP, in an economic climate marked by the widespread use of single-source procurement across many ministries.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, THIRD TERM AND VIOLENCE IN 2020

One of the most significant political events of the 2011–2020 decade was the project to amend the Constitution, which, rather than resolving Côte d'Ivoire's socio-political problems, reignited them. Following the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis, President Alassane Ouattara promised the adoption of a new Constitution, since the 2000 Constitution was deemed problematic. The latter contained several articles considered contentious, notably those based on the concept of "Ivoirité." The ruling party argued that these provisions facilitated the exclusion of certain Ivorians, particularly those born to only one Ivorian parent. The amendment of these articles was presented by supporters of the "YES" vote in the referendum as a decisive step toward the lasting resolution of the identity and nationality crisis. A new Constitution was thus approved by referendum in October 2016, with the objective of "building a stronger, more stable nation" and one that is "reconciled and at peace," according to President Ouattara.

48 <https://peri.umass.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/CIV-French-WP-526-10-22-20.pdf>

49 <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/CI/situation-economique-et-financiere#:~:text=Des%20in%C3%A9galit%C3%A9s%20subsistent%20entre%20Abidjan,plus%20de%2090%20%25%20des%20emplois.>

The most notable change was the removal of the controversial “Ivoirité” clause.⁵⁰ The Ivorian fundamental law of 8 November 2016⁵¹, as amended by Constitutional Law No. 2020-348 of 19 March 2020, stipulates that a presidential candidate “must be exclusively of Ivorian nationality, born of a father or a mother of Ivorian origin.” By contrast, the 2000 Constitution (Article 35) required that the candidate be born of both a father and a mother who were Ivorian by origin.

Article 55 (2016 Constitution)

The President of the Republic is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage. He may be re-elected only once. He chooses a Vice-President of the Republic, who is elected at the same time as him. The candidate for the presidential election must enjoy civil and political rights and must be at least thirty-five years old. He must be exclusively of Ivorian nationality, born of a father or a mother of Ivorian origin.

Article 35 (Constitution of 1 August 2000)

The President of the Republic is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage. He may be re-elected only once. The candidate for the presidential election must be at least forty years old and no more than seventy-five years old. He must be Ivorian by origin, born of a father and a mother who are themselves Ivorian by origin. He must never have renounced Ivorian nationality. He must never have claimed another nationality. He must have resided in Côte d'Ivoire continuously for five years preceding the date of the elections and must have accumulated ten years of effective presence. The residence requirement indicated in this article does not apply to members of diplomatic and consular missions, persons designated by the State to occupy a post or carry out a mission abroad, international civil servants, and political exiles. The candidate for the Presidency of the Republic must present a complete

statement of physical and mental well-being duly certified by a panel of three physicians appointed by the Constitutional Council from a list proposed by the Medical Council. These three physicians must swear an oath before the Constitutional Council. The candidate must be of good moral character and of great integrity. He must declare his assets and justify their origin.

Beyond the distinction between “and” and “or,” a source of political discord since the 1990s, the 2016 Constitution introduces several major institutional innovations. The position of Vice-President is created, elected on the same ticket as the President and tasked with ensuring continuity of the State in the event of a vacancy of power. Bicameralism is also established with the creation of a Senate alongside the existing National Assembly. Two-thirds of senators are elected, while the remaining third is appointed by the President of the Republic. The creation of the Senate reflected Ouattara’s ambition to endow Côte d'Ivoire with new institutions intended to support its modernisation. On several occasions, the Ivorian president argued that “the establishment of the Senate in Côte d'Ivoire is not a luxury, but a development necessity,” aimed at “ensuring greater efficiency within Parliament.” From its inception, the 2018 finance law allocated a budget of 3.375 billion CFA francs to the Senate. The opposition and part of civil society, however, denounced an institution deemed excessively costly in a country facing fundamental social challenges, particularly in health and education. The argument of increased legislative efficiency also struggled to convince, insofar as 33 senators are appointed directly by the Head of State. In a country where the National Assembly is already dominated by the ruling party, with 137 out of 254 seats, this configuration strengthened the executive’s control over the legislature. The presidential appointment of one-third of senators was thus perceived as a form of direct interference in the functioning of legislative power, limiting the existence of genuine democratic debate surrounding the adoption of laws.

50 <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/elfenbeinkueste/13696.pdf>

51 <https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/Ivorian%20Constitution%20of%202016.pdf>

The real point of tension linked to the new Constitution, however, was in the interpretation of the limitation on presidential terms.⁵² Although the 2016 Constitution maintains the two-term limit, supporters of President Ouattara argued that this provision no longer applies to the incumbent president.⁵³ According to them, the adoption of a new Constitution reset the presidential term counter to zero, thereby opening the way to a third term. At the time of the adoption of the new constitutional text, part of the Ivorian political class believed that President Ouattara would respect the spirit of term limits by stepping down after two mandates. The opposition and civil society nevertheless expressed strong concerns, considering that a third term violated the Constitution. The prospect of such a scenario fueled fears of a gradual return to a system of extended presidency, or even a dominant-party regime reminiscent of the 1960–1990 period. Several political leaders then evoked autocratic tendencies and democratic backsliding.

Ouattara initially announced that he would not seek a third term.⁵⁴ However, the gradual deterioration of his relations with the PDCI-RDA (Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire) left no one indifferent. The withdrawal of the PDCI from the RHDP alliance weakened the coalition in power since 2011 and raised fears of renewed political disputes. As a reminder, the PDCI of Henri Konan Bédié and the RDR of Alassane Ouattara had already opposed each other on the political scene in the 1990s, with episodes marked by protest marches, electoral boycotts, and arrests of RDR officials. These historical tensions, long contained within the RHDP alliance, gradually resurfaced and materialised during the 2020 presidential election.

The PDCI then called for a boycott of the vote, a strategy that contributed to the outbreak of violence.⁵⁵ According to the National

Human Rights Council (CNDH), between 31 October and 10 November 2020, the death toll amounted to 55 deaths and 282 injured.

Between 2018 and 2020, the PDCI of former President Henri Konan Bédié refused to join the RHDP when it transformed into a unified party in 2018. Information suggesting a rupture or political divorce with the alliance led by Alassane Ouattara circulated for several months before being confirmed by the PDCI. According to the party, the political agreement underpinning the RHDP alliance was based on a principle of alternation within the coalition.

After supporting Alassane Ouattara for two terms at the head of the State, the logic was that the coalition's candidate should come from the ranks of the PDCI. Led by Henri Konan Bédié, the party thus believed that the former president could either seek a new term or designate one of his senior figures as a candidate for the presidency. Another actor also claimed the right to succeed Ouattara: Guillaume Soro. A former rebel leader and decisive military supporter of Ouattara during the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis, Soro had long been perceived as the unofficial heir apparent to the Ivorian president. His appointment as President of the National Assembly made him the constitutional successor to the Head of State. However, the creation of the Vice-President position in the 2016 Constitution removed him from the presidential line of succession.

Moreover, the Union for Democracy and Peace in Côte d'Ivoire (UDPCI), another component of the RHDP, officially left the coalition in August 2020, citing the precedent set by the PDCI. The lack of political alternation within the RHDP thus placed the other coalition parties in a position perceived as subordinate to Ouattara's RDR. These dissident parties nevertheless possessed significant electoral weight.

52 <https://www.leclubdesjuristes.com/archives-cdj/en-cote-divoire-un-mandat-presidentiel-3-en-1-lincertitude-constitutionnelle-face-a-la-candidature-du-president-ouattara-3191/>

53 <https://www.thinkingafrica.org/V2/sur-la-possibilite-dun-troisieme-mandat-en-cote-divoire/>

54 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NA1MFBoTJZo>

55 <https://www.amnesty.fr/liberte-d-expression/actualites/cote-divoire-lhorreur-des-violences-post-electorales>

The PDCI maintained a strong presence in central Côte d'Ivoire, while the UDPCI enjoyed substantial support in the mountainous western region. Their departure and potential alliances with the opposition potentially reduced the RHDP's chances of remaining in power. An alliance between the PDCI and Laurent Gbagbo's PPA-CI, firmly rooted in the South and Center-West, was seen as having potential to tip the outcome of a presidential election in favor of the opposition.

Faced with the departure of his allies and to calm public concerns, Ouattara designated his Prime Minister, Amadou Gon Coulibaly, as his successor.⁵⁶ The latter was known for his close relationship with the President and is often described as a loyal and reliable technocrat. His political career is marked by a long and close collaboration with Alassane Ouattara, dating back to the early 1990s. A prominent member of the ruling party, he notably held the position of First Vice-President of the Rally of Republicans (RDR). A Member of Parliament and mayor of Korhogo (in northern Côte d'Ivoire), Coulibaly served several times as a minister between 2002 and 2011, before being appointed Minister of State and Secretary-General of the Presidency of the Republic. The position prepared him for the role of Prime Minister, which he held from 10 January 2017 until his death on 8 July 2020.⁵⁷

His sudden death disrupted the established political balance.⁵⁸ Following this event, President Ouattara ultimately announced his candidacy for a third term in 2020, arguing that the 2016 Constitution, marking the end of the transition period, reset the term limits. This interpretation triggered a new major political crisis.

The opposition, led by Henri Konan Bédié and Pascal Affi N'Guessan, called for a boycott and civil disobedience, fearing a return to instability. Opposition parties grouped around the PDCI and the FPI considered refusal to participate in the vote an act of democratic resistance. They denounced a locked electoral process, criticising the composition of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), deemed favorable to the ruling power, as well as the role of the Constitutional Council in invalidating certain candidacies. They also demanded an independent audit of the electoral register. The strategy adopted by the opposition was drastic. The main leaders — Henri Konan Bédié, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, Assoa Adou, among others — called on their supporters not to vote, to prevent the organisation of the poll in certain localities, and urged the international community not to recognise the election results. As the vote took place despite the boycott, the opposition announced the creation of a National Transitional Council aimed at “restoring democracy” after the vote.

Quattara's decision to seek a third term and the opposition's call for a boycott led to new electoral violence⁵⁹, revealing the persistent fragility of peace. The boycott resulted in roadblocks, attempts to prevent the distribution of electoral materials, violent mobilisation, and clashes between young supporters of the opposition and the ruling party. In several regions of the Center, East, and West, the tensions escalated into intercommunal clashes. In the traditional strongholds of the PDCI, notably Daoukro, Bongouanou, Prikro, M'Batto, and Arrah, the violence was particularly intense. Homes, businesses, and public buildings were

56 <https://www.7info.ci/amadou-gon-coulibaly-portrait-du-candidat-du-rhdp/>

57 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/07/08/cote-d-ivoire-le-premier-ministre-et-candidat-a-la-presidentielle-amadou-gon-coulibaly-est-mort_6045646_3212.html

58 « Côte d'Ivoire : le plan de Ouattara pour « coacher » Gon Coulibaly », *La Lettre du Continent*, n°734, 20 juillet 2016 et « Côte d'Ivoire : Gon Coulibaly ajoute de nouvelles pièces à son costume de présidentiable », *La Lettre du Continent*, n°745, 18 janvier 2017.

59 <https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2020/12/02/cote-divoire-violences-postelectorales-et-repression>

burnt, and several deaths were recorded. In several localities, many polling stations were ransacked or set on fire, preventing the conduct of the vote. The police and gendarmerie, heavily deployed, faced extremely tense situations, managing in some cases to contain the clashes.

It was in this climate of intense tension that Ouattara was re-elected with 94.27% of the vote. On election day, the security situation varied greatly by region. In Abidjan and several northern cities, voting took place in relative calm, while in opposition areas many polling stations were ransacked or burned. Fear of violence discouraged part of the electorate from going to the polls. The clashes resulted in several dozen deaths and numerous injuries, according to official and independent sources. The election was marked by a voter turnout of approximately 53.9%, a figure contested by the opposition.⁶⁰ On 3 November, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) announced the results confirming the victory of the incumbent president with over 94% of the vote. Considering the election illegitimate, the opposition established a National Transitional Council (CNT). This parallel governing body aimed to ensure a transition of executive power, prepare a consensual institutional framework, organise a new consensual presidential election, and restore “the rule of law.” The initiative was led by former President Henri Konan Bédié. The government’s reaction was immediate. The CNT was described as an attempt at destabilisation seeking to “replace legally established republican institutions.” Arrests of opposition figures multiplied, weakening their mobilisation dynamic. Gradually, political leaders favored dialogue, which materialised in December 2020 through a meeting between Ouattara and Bédié.

The government quickly hardened its stance toward dissenters and opposition initiatives. Bédié, was placed under a form of political isolation. From 3 November 2020, security forces imposed a blockade around his residence, limiting his movements and contacts, without proceeding to his arrest. At the same time, authorities carried out targeted arrests within opposition ranks. Former Prime Minister and President of the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), Pascal Affi N’Guessan, a member of the CNT, was arrested on the night of 6–7 November 2020 in Akoupé, a town located approximately 100 km from Abidjan. Meanwhile, the army played its sovereign role by deploying across the territory to ensure the security of persons and property. The police and gendarmerie were also mobilised in several localities affected by electoral and communal violence. From exile, Guillaume Soro issued a public call to the army to block Ouattara.⁶¹ In a message broadcast on social media and followed by more than 50,000 viewers, the former rebel leader described President Ouattara as a “former president” and a “dictator,” referring to a power vacuum, a violation of the Constitution, and brutal repression of the opposition. He supported the CNT’s actions and urged soldiers to act to stop the killings. Although this call provoked no institutional reaction from the army, it nonetheless fueled a climate of concern among the population, especially given that many senior figures in the Ivorian army originated from the former Forces Nouvelles rebellion once led by Guillaume Soro. Despite these tensions, no military overthrow of the Ouattara regime occurred.

The 2020 clashes proved particularly deadly, recalling the dark hours of the 2010–2011 crisis.⁶² According to figures reported by various sources, including the Abidjan

60 https://www.cei.ci/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/EPR_2020_EXCEL_NATIONAL_PAR_DEPARTEMENT_V4.pdf

61 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1069363/politique/cote-divoire-guillaume-soro-appelle-larmee-a-agir-face-a-lassane-ouattara/>

62 <https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2020/12/02/cote-divoire-violences-postelectorales-et-repression>

Prosecutor in late 2021, the violence resulted in approximately 85 deaths and nearly 500 injuries. Several national and international human rights organisations confirmed the scale of the violence through consistent reports. The main analyses and documentation relating to the electoral violence during the October 31, 2020 presidential election were produced by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), United Nations agencies, notably the UNHCR, as well as the African Union through its electoral observation mission. The African Union noted a tense political context marked by the opposition boycott and numerous violent incidents, recommending the opening of an inclusive political dialogue to prevent the recurrence of similar crises. Amnesty International reported extremely violent clashes between opposition supporters and ruling party supporters before and after the vote and aligned with the official CNDH figures, which recorded 55 deaths and 282 injured between 31 October and 10 November

2020. Human Rights Watch confirmed a toll of over 50 deaths and dozens of injuries resulting from political and intercommunal violence, while also denouncing the excessive use of force by security forces, including the use of live ammunition and physical abuse against civilians. Finally, the UN and UNHCR reported that the violence caused more than 8,000 Ivorians to flee to neighboring countries, including 7,500 to Liberia in the days following the vote.⁶³

The clashes involved opposition supporters and backers of the ruling party (RHDP), using firearms, machetes, and clubs. Despite the gradual return to calm and the resumption of political dialogue from late 2020 and early 2021, many opposition members remained under prosecution in connection with the violence, illustrating the persistence of political and judicial tension in the post-crisis period. The arrest of main opposition figures linked to the electoral violence during the 2020 presidential election is summarised in Table 1 below;

Name	Political party / Position	Date of arrest	Charge(s)	Statut
Pascal Affi N'Guessan	President of FPI, ex-First minister	6-7 November 2020	Conspiracy against the State, insurrectionary movement, acts of terrorism	Released under judicial supervision (Dec. 2020)
Maurice Kakou Guikahué	Executive Secretary of PDCI	Start of November 2020	Participation in the CNT, undermining State authority	Provisionally released (2021)
Albert Mabri Toikeusse	President of UDPCI, ex-minister	Arrest warrant (Nov. 2020)	CNT, insurrection	On the run at the time of the events
21 individuals (officials PDCI/FPI)	Various parties of the National Transitional Council (CNT)	3 november 2020	Attempted illegal transition	Nine were quickly released, while the others were prosecuted
Other leaders and militants	Opposition (CNT)	November 2020	Theft and/or damage of electoral materials, disturbance of public order	Several were released in 2021

63 <https://www.unhcr.org/fr-fr/actualites/points-de-presse/le-hcr-intensifie-laide-humanitaire-le-nombre-des-refugies-ivoiriens>

Pascal Affi N'Guessan was released on 30 December 2020⁶⁴ after several weeks of detention. Other opposition activists and officials were released in the weeks that followed. The releases formed part of the broader framework of renewed political dialogue between the government and the main opposition forces, initiated following meetings between President Ouattara and Bédié. Nevertheless, despite the gesture of openness, many human rights organisations and observers continued to denounce arbitrary detentions. They also highlighted the lack of sufficient guarantees regarding fair trials for individuals detained in the crackdown.

Repressive Laws Against Freedom of Expression

The violence linked to the 2020 elections definitively widened the rift between the government and the opposition.⁶⁵ The return of Laurent Gbagbo to Côte d'Ivoire in 2021 did not change this situation.⁶⁶ Gbagbo, as well as Charles Blé Goudé, had been prosecuted on four counts of crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis. The judges found that the evidence presented by the prosecution was insufficient to establish the criminal responsibility of the accused, with some even describing this evidence as being of “exceptional weakness.” Upon his return to Côte d'Ivoire, Gbagbo called for the release of political prisoners. In total, 233 people had been arrested in 2020 as part of an investigation into the violence that occurred during the presidential election. One year after the elections, several political figures, including Bédié, were still in the sights of the judiciary. He was suspected of subversive financial operations. As president of the PDCI-RDA, Bédié was the leader of the opposition in 2020. He was implicated by the Ivorian justice system in connection with the electoral violence.

The accusations formulated by the prosecutor and the Special Investigation Unit (USE) were based on Article 54 of the 2005 law on the status of former presidents. This law allows a former head of state to be tried like any other defendant in the event of offenses committed during an electoral period. The official USE report accused Bédié of having been the instigator and principal financier of the unrest that occurred between August and November 2020. He was suspected of having financed several subversive operations through close associates, including his chief of staff N'Dri Narcisse and senior members of the PDCI. These actions were aimed at blocking roads and organising violence in areas such as Daoukro and Toumodi. As leader of the opposition, he issued a call for civil disobedience and supported the creation of the National Transitional Council, which the authorities considered an attempt to overthrow the State.

Long before 2020, judicial pressure mounted against the opposition. Gbagbo and three of his former ministers, including his former Prime Minister Gilbert Aké N'Gbo, were sentenced in 2018 to twenty years in prison and fined 329 billion CFA francs.⁶⁷ They were accused of the “robbery” of the National Agency of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) during the Ivorian post-electoral crisis. As early as 2018, observers of the Ivorian political scene were already evoking the disqualification of Gbagbo for the 2025 presidential election. Indeed, this conviction entailed the loss of his civil and political rights, meaning that he could not vote or stand for election if the conviction was not annulled. In 2022, Ouattara granted him a presidential pardon, sparing him from serving his sentence, without however annulling the conviction. Unlike an amnesty, a presidential pardon does not restore civil rights. Legally, Gbagbo therefore remained ineligible. Only an exceptional decision, through an amnesty

64 <https://www.amnesty.fr/liberte-d-expression/actualites/cote-divoire-lhorreur-des-violences-post-electorales>

65 <https://www.article19.org/fr/resources/cote-divoire-the-government-must-lift-the-ban-on-protest/>

66 <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/03/1093092>

67 <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-affaire-de-la-bceao-gbagbo-condamn%C3%A9-%C3%A0-20-ans-de-prison-/1035570>

or judicial rehabilitation, could allow him to be reinstated on the electoral roll. This exceptional measure, expected as a gesture of openness, was not taken by the Ivorian president.

Before Gbagbo, it was the former rebel leader and president of the National Assembly, Guillaume Soro, who had fallen from favor and eventually went into exile. When he became president of the National Assembly on March 12, 2012, Soro was, under the 2000 Constitution⁶⁸, the second-ranking figure in the State and the successor to the President of the Republic in the event of a vacancy of power. Beyond the constitutional framework, his closeness to Ouattara—whom he had supported with the rebellion of the New Forces (FN)—positioned him as a natural successor.⁶⁹

The political rift between Soro and Ouattara arose from the alleged involvement of the former rebel leader in the 2017 mutinies. Political figures close to the authorities as well as certain analysts claimed that Guillaume Soro had instrumentalised the discontent of the mutineers, due to his influence over former rebels integrated into the army. These accusations were reinforced after the discovery of an arms cache in Bouaké, at the residence of his protocol director, Souleymane Kamaraté Koné, also known as Soul To Soul. Guillaume Soro has always maintained that it was not an arms cache, explaining that the presence of these weapons had been known to Ivorian authorities for several years. The radical wing of the RHDP saw in these events either an attempted coup d'État or a maneuver of political pressure aimed at forcing Ouattara to designate Soro as his successor.

However, the adoption of a new Constitution in 2016⁷⁰ and the creation of the position of Vice-President altered the institutional balance. The President of the National Assembly was no longer the constitutional heir to the Head of State. According to the new Article 55 of the Ivorian Constitution of November 8, 2016, amended by Constitutional Law No. 2020-348 of March 19, 2020: "The President of the Republic is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage. He may be re-elected only once. He appoints a Vice-President of the Republic, in agreement with Parliament. The candidate for the presidential election must enjoy civil and political rights and must be at least thirty-five years old. He must be exclusively of Ivorian nationality, born of an Ivorian father or mother of origin."

The creation of the vice-presidential post was presented as a major innovation for the Third Republic. According to Ouattara, this reform was intended to place the country "out of reach of tensions and uncertainties that could lead to economic slowdown" and to resolve issues of immediate succession in the event of a vacancy of power. Côte d'Ivoire had already experienced a succession crisis in the 1990s following the death of President Houphouët-Boigny, which pitted Alassane Ouattara, then Prime Minister, against Henri Konan Bédié, President of the National Assembly. To avoid a new crisis, succession now directly devolves upon the Vice-President.

Soro was therefore no longer in a position as Ouattara's successor, and the 2017 mutinies only worsened the situation.⁷¹ The mutinies occurred at two distinct moments during 2017. In January, the mutiny mainly affected Abidjan as well as several major cities such as Bouaké, a stronghold of the former rebellion.

68 <https://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/ea778cb20fbdd7a77fe62ae0c85bbd87c0757abd.pdf>

69 <https://www.aegis-eu.org/archive/ecas4/ecas-4/panels/41-60/panel-49/Fofana-Moussa-Full-paper.pdf>

70 <https://loidici.biz/2020/03/31/loi-constitutionnelle-n-2020-348-du-19-mars-2020-modifiant-la-loi-n-2016-886-du-8-novembre-2016-portant-constitution-de-la-republique-de-cote-divoire/lois-article-par-article/codes/la-constitution-ivoirienne/19341/naty/>

71 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/440562/politique/cote-divoire-retour-mutinerie-reussie/>

It raised fears of a coup d'État, as heavily armed mutineers moved toward Plateau, the administrative center and seat of the presidential palace. The soldiers, mostly from the New Forces integrated into the national army after the 2010–2011 crisis, demanded full payment of promised bonuses, estimated at 12 million CFA francs per man (approximately 18,300 euros). Approximately 8,400 soldiers—mostly rank-and-file troops—were concerned by these demands. According to the government, four deaths were recorded in Yamoussoukro.⁷² Investigations led to five arrests, including two gendarmes imprisoned for vehicle theft and three soldiers imprisoned for homicide.

After the January mutiny, President Ouattara announced that an agreement had been reached with the mutineers. However, starting on May 8, the mutineers once again made themselves heard. They denounced the failure to respect the agreements concluded in January 2017 with the government. At least six deaths were recorded and several people were injured. The army, for its part, continued investigations aimed at determining responsibility for the two mutinies.

The army inherited by Côte d'Ivoire after the 2002–2011 politico-military crisis is the result of a long process of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration. The process was officially launched with the Linas-Marcoussis Agreements in 2003, followed by the Ouagadougou Agreements (2007), and was completed in 2014. The current Ivorian army is the result of the merger between the National Armed Forces (FANCI) and the New Forces (FAFN), giving rise to the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) in 2011. Approximately 74,068 ex-combatants were identified, including 69,506 who were disarmed and reintegrated. More than 25,000 weapons and one million rounds of

ammunition were collected. Guillaume Soro therefore had under his command some of the men who now make up the Ivorian army and is suspected, rightly or wrongly, of continuing to influence former rebels, several of whom are now senior officers in the Ivorian army.

Th January and May 2017 mutinies⁷³ had a significant impact in major Ivorian cities. The mutineers erected barricades and sustained gunfire was heard in several cities, including Abidjan (notably in the Plateau district, the administrative and business center, and near Camp Gallieni). Activities were paralyzed in these cities, with schools and businesses closed.

Negotiations allowed for a resolution of the crisis, at the cost of heavy financial concessions by the State. The government gave “priority to peace and security” and ultimately agreed to pay the requested sums⁷⁴, although the government spokesperson refused to disclose the exact figures immediately after the agreement. Subsequently, the government announced the dismissal of 230 soldiers and gendarmes at the end of 2017 for serious misconduct.

Confusion took hold within the RHDP. The moderate wing referred to a simple outburst of discontent, while the radical wing accused Soro of orchestrating the events. Increasingly isolated, he resigned from his functions on February 8, 2019. In October 2019, he announced his candidacy for the 2020 presidential election and formalised the creation of Générations et Peuples Solidaires (GPS), a movement largely structured around digital tools and social networks to mobilise youth and the diaspora. This strategy quickly attracted young activists, former rebel leaders, and members of the Federation of Ivorian Students and Pupils (FESCI), a student union he led between 1995 and 1998. Other supporters seeking a renewal of the Ivorian political class were also drawn to his discourse.

72 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/05/26/cote-d-ivoire-comment-les-mutins-ont-fait-plier-le-gouvernement_5134181_3212.html

73 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/440562/politique/cote-divoire-retour-mutinerie-reussie/>

74 <https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Afrique/En-Cote-dIvoire-accord-met-fin-mutine-ries-2017-05-17-1200847817>

As GPS gained visibility, the Ivorian authorities hardened their stance. At the end of 2019, Soro was accused of preparing an insurrection and a plot against the State. An arrest warrant was issued against him as he attempted to return to Côte d'Ivoire a few months before the 2020 presidential election. In 2020 and 2021, the Ivorian authorities dissolved GPS, banned several meetings, and prosecuted or imprisoned several leaders and activists of the movement. Guillaume Soro began to forge an image as a committed political figure, enough to worry his former allies within the RHDP. Although his chances of winning an election in the first round were minimal against Ouattara, it was his rapprochement with the opposition that caused concern. Now a political actor, Soro remains respected by many soldiers who served under his command within the New Forces rebellion. He thus retains the image of a political figure with a hand on the trigger. A series of legal troubles began on December 20, 2019. Soro was prosecuted for "receiving misappropriated public funds" and "money laundering," then for "plotting and undermining State security." The offense was allegedly committed while he held the position of Prime Minister in 2007. He and 19 of his close associates arrested in December 2019 were targeted by the judiciary. After an initial sentence of 20 years in prison, he was ultimately sentenced to life imprisonment on June 23, 2021, for an attempted coup d'État in December 2019.⁷⁵ Regarding these two cases, Soro's defense denounced a "political scheme" intended to "remove him from the race" for the 2020 presidential election.

In the case of undermining State security and military insurrection, the public prosecutor relied on a telephone recording and material evidence relating to the Bouaké arms cache. This involved military equipment consisting of boxes of ammunition, anti-tank missiles, Kalashnikovs, and communications equipment. In the misappropriation case,

the defense pointed to inconsistencies in the evidence presented against Soro. It alleged false accusations and fabricated evidence, while also denouncing espionage operations and assassination attempts targeting Soro on European territory. Soro himself rejected the various convictions handed down against him, denouncing a judiciary under orders and an Ivorian judicial apparatus subject to the dictates of the Executive.

Since the end of the post-electoral crisis and the rise to power of Ouattara, the independence of the judiciary has been called into question in various legal cases. Opposition political parties and civil society have used various expressions to characterise the lack of independence of the Ivorian justice system, whose decisions appear to be driven more by politics than by law. "Instrumentalization of justice," "victors' justice," "justice under orders," "two-tier justice," or "justice as the armed wing of the RHDP" are expressions that recur after each judicial decision.⁷⁶

While he was in exile, an international arrest warrant was issued against Soro on December 23, 2019. He was accused of preparing an alleged plot aimed at destabilising the Abidjan regime, accusations he has always denied, to the point of involving the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in March 2020.⁷⁷ On April 22, 2020, the Court ordered the suspension of the arrest warrant against Soro and the provisional release of 19 of his supporters. It considered that execution of the warrant risked violating fundamental freedoms, the presumption of innocence, and compromising their political rights. Despite the ACHPR ruling, the Ivorian judiciary maintained the prosecutions and the international arrest warrant. On April 28, 2020, Soro was sentenced in absentia to twenty years in prison, a fine of 4.5 billion CFA francs, and deprivation of his civil rights for five years.

⁷⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-55826165>

⁷⁶ <https://www.dw.com/fr/pour-un-proc%C3%A8s-%C3%A9quitable-des-prisonniers-de-la-crise-post-%C3%A9lectorale-ivoirienne/a-43705535>

⁷⁷ <https://www.african-court.org/cpmt/fr/details-case/0122020>

Deemed undesirable in France, Soro was seen in Turkey and more recently in member countries of the AES (Alliance of Sahel States), which maintain strained relations with Côte d'Ivoire.⁷⁸ The AES was formed on September 16, 2023, through the signing of the "Liptako-Gourma Charter." In January 2024, the three States officially announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS, causing a major reconfiguration of the regional landscape. The AES presents itself as a defensive and sovereign bloc—claiming a "shared destiny space," distinct from the presumed Western influence embodied by ECOWAS. Despite the withdrawal of AES countries from ECOWAS, trade with Côte d'Ivoire remains essential. In 2024, Ivorian exports to one of these countries—Mali—represented a significant amount. However, at the security level, relations have deteriorated. These tensions originate in Côte d'Ivoire's desire to support a military intervention in Niger. Abidjan's stance following the military coup in Niger placed the country on the list of "enemy countries" of the AES. Ouagadougou has repeatedly accused Côte d'Ivoire of being a rear base for jihadist and terrorist groups destabilising Burkina Faso. Furthermore, Côte d'Ivoire has hosted opponents and former dignitaries of the ousted Blaise Compaoré regime accused of being involved in subversive actions aimed at destabilising the ruling junta in Ouagadougou. Côte d'Ivoire is also accused of associating with France in operations to train and equip terrorist groups with weapons, means of transport (motorcycles, pickup trucks), and ammunition.

Between 2020 and 2024⁷⁹, judicial pressure extended to other opposition and civil society actors.⁸⁰ Several arrests, convictions, and prosecutions involved activists, political militants, and association leaders. In this context, Soro's former aide-de-camp,

Commander Abdoulaye Fofana, was arrested in May 2022 in Abidjan after three years of exile in France. He was prosecuted for "plotting against State authority and forming armed bands." The arrest followed Fofana's dissemination of a video on social media in which he accused the Ivorian authorities of concealing information relating to the Kafolo attack. The remarks were interpreted by the authorities as calls for mutiny and destabilisation of the State, justifying the issuance of an arrest warrant prior to his return to Côte d'Ivoire.

Having returned to Abidjan for family reasons, Fofana was arrested during his stay. The prosecutor's office considered his return suspicious, believing that he may have contacted military personnel. On July 28, 2025, the Court of First Instance of Plateau sentenced him to fifteen years in prison for "terrorist acts" and "plotting against State authority."

At the same time, on August 23, 2022, Pulchérie Gbalet, a leading figure of Ivorian civil society and president of Alternative Citoyenne Ivoirienne (ACI), was placed under committal order and imprisoned at the Abidjan Detention and Correction Facility. She was accused of "collusion with agents of a foreign power."⁸¹ The case unfolded in a tense diplomatic context between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, marked by the detention of 49 Ivorian soldiers in Bamako since July 2022. Gbalet had traveled to Mali in early August 2022, where she met several Malian personalities. Upon her return to Abidjan, she was briefly arrested on August 3, questioned, and then released. On August 22, 2022, she was summoned by the police to retrieve her passport and mobile phone confiscated during her first arrest. Her defense denounced an "ambush," asserting that she was arrested and placed under committal order during this meeting.

78 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/11/13/l-opposant-ivoirien-guillaume-soro-reapparaît-au-niger_6199922_3212.html

79 https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/cote-divoire-prelim-110220-fr.pdf

80 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/cote-divoire/318-election-presidentielle-sous-tension-le-paradoxe-ivoirien>

81 <https://mfwa.org/fr/issues-in-focus/lactiviste-pulcherie-gbalet-retrouve-la-liberte-apres-huit-mois-de-detention-suite-a-des-manifestations-anti-ouattara/>

The charges included “collusion with agents of a foreign power likely to harm the military and diplomatic situation of Côte d’Ivoire” and “maneuvers likely to discredit institutions and cause serious disturbances to public order.”

Judicial repression also affected political party activists. On March 9, 2023, 26 opposition activists were sentenced to two years in prison for having demonstrated on February 24, 2023, against the summons of Damana Pickass, Secretary-General of the African Peoples’ Party – Côte d’Ivoire (PPA-CI). He had been summoned by an investigating judge for his alleged role in the attack on a military barracks in Abidjan in 2021. During this mobilisation, 31 people were arrested and detained. The court sentenced 26 of them to two years in prison for “disturbance of public order.” The defense challenged this qualification, arguing that the alleged disturbance had not been established and that this charge is used as an expansive legal instrument intended to restrict opposition activity.

Arrests continued in 2023. On November 18, in Odienné (northern Côte d’Ivoire), two senior members of the Générations et Peuples Solidaires (GPS) movement were arrested, five days after Soro’s public reappearance in Niger. At the same time, Stive Biko, whose real name is Djaman Francis, an Ivorian activist close to Gbagbo, was arrested on November 17, 2023, in Nouakchott, where he had been living in exile since 2011. Very active on social media, he regularly posted videos and virulent messages against the Ivorian authorities. His arrest was carried out by Ivorian intelligence services and the Mauritanian law enforcement agencies. He was arrested at the airport while preparing to travel to Europe and extradited to Côte d’Ivoire and imprisoned in Abidjan. He was prosecuted for defamation, public insult, and incitement to hatred. He was sentenced to five years in prison but rumors of his death in detention circulated in late December 2023. These reports were quickly denied by the Ivorian authorities.

In 2024, Soro’s two associates were also targeted. In August, Soro Mamadou Traoré and Kando Soumahoro were sentenced to prison terms accompanied by deprivation of their civil rights. Mamadou Traoré was arrested on August 9, 2024, in Abidjan following summons by the criminal police.⁸² He was prosecuted for disseminating “false information” and “disturbing public order,” after claiming that military equipment displayed during the August 7, 2024 parade had been rented from the Takuba force. He also describing the President of the Republic as a “liar.” He was sentenced on August 16, 2024, to two years in prison, a fine of 500,000 CFA francs, and five years of deprivation of civil rights. Kando Soumahoro was arrested on August 13, 2024, for participating in an opposition meeting and signing a joint declaration on behalf of GPS, a party dissolved by judicial decision in 2021. On August 21, 2024, he was sentenced to three years in prison, including two years firm, accompanied by five years of deprivation of civil rights.

In the same vein, Charles Rodel Dosso, Deputy Secretary-General of the PPA-CI in charge of civil society, was arrested at his home on October 5, 2024, by armed and hooded men acting without any apparent judicial warrant.⁸³ He was accused of co-organizing a banned demonstration on September 13, 2024, against the high cost of living and forced evictions. During that same march, around thirty demonstrators were arrested, including 19 sentenced to six months in prison and a fine of 100,000 CFA francs (approximately 152 euros). Charged on October 7, 2024, with disturbing public order and undermining State security, the arrest of Charles Rodel Dosso drew strong criticism from the opposition and human rights organizations. In all these cases, lawyers denounced political trials, while the opposition spoke of targeted repression of critical voices and the instrumentalization of justice in the run-up to the 2025 presidential election.

82 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cote-divoire>

83 <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-le-parti-de-gbagbo-d%C3%A9nonces-des-arrestations-arbitraires-/7816661.html>

These arrests took place within a legal framework marked by amendments to the Penal Code and the adoption of new laws. Charges such as “disturbance of public order,” “dissemination of false information,” and “undermining State security” were frequently used. The shift from a declaratory regime to a prior authorisation regime for public demonstrations profoundly altered the exercise of the right to protest. Similarly, the broad interpretation of provisions relating to the dissemination of false information, particularly with regard to Articles 183 and 372 of the Penal Code and Law No. 2013-451 on cybercrime, generated intense controversy. The opposition and civil society believe these texts were used to repress political opinions rather than genuine disinformation campaigns.

The third frequently invoked charge—“undermining State security”—has been recurrently used by the prosecutor’s office since the end of the 2011 post-electoral crisis. This legal qualification regularly appeared in major political trials between 2012 and 2025 in Côte d’Ivoire. In the Ivorian context, it covers very diverse realities. The most emblematic judicial decisions show that it can encompass participation in mass violence, alleged or supposed plots, as well as calls for civil disobedience. This broad scope of interpretation opens the door to extensive, even political, uses of this charge, based on specific articles of the Penal Code.

This repressive dynamic also fits within a broader legislative framework affecting freedom of expression. One year after the adoption of a new Constitution, the National Assembly passed Law No. 2017-867 of December 27, 2017⁸⁴, governing the legal regime of the press. Although this law formally enshrines the decriminalisation of press offenses, it has drawn strong criticism from professional organisations and human rights defenders. Despite the explicit

exclusion of detention and imprisonment for press offenses provided for in Article 89, the law contains loopholes that may be exploited against journalists.

At the same time, the Penal Code continues to provide for prison sentences for offense to the Head of State, constituting an indirect means of pressure on journalists and media actors expressing critical opinions of the authorities. The financial penalties provided are also dissuasive, with fines of up to 10 million CFA francs (approximately 15,245 euros) for insult or publication of false news via the press. The fight against the dissemination of false information is therefore a central lever for restricting freedoms. In this regard, Article 65 of Law No. 2013-451 of June 19, 2013⁸⁵, on the fight against cybercrime, together with Article 372 of the Penal Code, constitutes the legal foundation of this policy. The cybercrime law aims to define and punish criminal offenses committed through telecommunications networks or information systems, including fraudulent access to systems, dissemination of illicit data, online identity theft, and the liability of technical service providers. It specifies that social networks are assimilated to “computer systems” and “information systems.”

Although interpretation of these provisions varies by case, Article 65 is most often used to frame repression of the dissemination of “fake news.” It provides that:

“Any person who communicates or disseminates, through an information system, false information intended to make it believed that a destruction, degradation, or deterioration of property or an attack on persons has been committed or is about to be committed shall be punished by six months to two years’ imprisonment and a fine of 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 CFA francs. The same penalties apply to any person who communicates or disseminates, through an information system, false information

84 <https://loidici.biz/2023/07/15/loi-n-2022-978-du-20-decembre-2022-modifiant-la-loi-n-2017-867-du-27-decembre-2017-portant-regime-juridique-de-la-presse/lois-article-par-article/plus-de-textes-de-lois/la-presse/44608/naty/>

85 <https://www.droit-afrique.com/upload/doc/cote-divoire/RCI-Loi-2013-451-lutte-cyber-criminalite.pdf>

suggesting the occurrence of a disaster or any other emergency situation.”

To this legal text is added Article 372 of the Penal Code, which provides the following penalties: “Any person who communicates or disseminates, through an information system, false information intended to make it believed that a destruction, degradation, or deterioration of property or an attack on persons has been committed or is about to be committed shall be punished by six months to two years’ imprisonment and a fine of 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 CFA francs. The same penalties apply to any person who communicates or disseminates, through an information system, false information suggesting the occurrence of a disaster or any other emergency situation.”

The Ivorian government justifies the use of these texts by asserting that the dissemination of false information represents a “real danger” in a country marked by years of political crisis and communal tensions. The authorities emphasise that viral rumors have in the past caused panic, violence, or disturbances of public order, particularly during electoral periods. However, while these laws were presented as tools to combat information manipulation and hate speech, their broad wording leaves significant room for interpretation by judicial authorities, allowing prosecutions against individuals for publications that are sometimes trivial or part of public debate. Several trials and arrests of bloggers, influencers, political activists, or ordinary social media users illustrate the tensions associated with this legal framework. Posts, videos, or comments sometimes falling within public debate have been characterised as “fake news,” “incitement to revolt,” or “disturbance of public order.” Some arrests have sparked debate over the proportionality of the measures adopted. Local organisations defending digital freedoms, as well as international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders (RSF), have been calling for reforms, including clearer legal

definitions, better training of judges and law-enforcement officers, and more accessible appeal mechanisms for prosecuted citizens.

In addition to this context of combating disinformation is the reform of the Penal Code adopted in 2024. Law No. 2024-358 of June 11, 2024, amending Law No. 2019-574 of June 26, 2019, establishing the Penal Code⁸⁶, initially presented as a response to shortcomings in the existing framework, has been widely criticised by civil society. It introduced the expansion of special investigative techniques such as infiltration, nighttime searches, and interception of communications for serious offenses such as cybercrime, money laundering, and terrorism. The Ivorian Penal Code, primarily derived from Law No. 2019-574 of June 26, 2019, had already undergone previous revisions, notably through Law No. 2021-893 of December 21, 2021, which amended several articles (3, 39, 67, 94, 94-1, among others). These successive revisions have gradually strengthened the powers of the security and defense forces—police, gendarmerie, intelligence services—at the expense of certain individual freedoms guaranteed to citizens.

The new provisions authorise wire tapping, infiltration missions, and other intrusive techniques “under strict conditions and governed by law” in investigations concerning crimes and offenses deemed serious. These operations may be conducted to seize evidence or dismantle criminal networks through the capture of speech or images. However, this increased latitude granted to law-enforcement agencies is perceived by many actors as likely to conflict with Article 450-1 of the Penal Code, which penalises violations of privacy through the capture, recording, or transmission of images or speech without consent, with consent presumed in the absence of explicit opposition. According to civil society organisations, these techniques show little respect for human rights and open the door to abuses, particularly in a sensitive electoral context.

86 <https://loidici.biz/2024/07/12/loi-n2024-358-du-11-juin-2024-modifiant-la-loi-n2019-574-du-26-juin-2019-portant-code-penal/lois-article-par-article/codes/le-code-penal/50891/naty/>

Within this framework, civil society and the opposition identify several articles of the Penal Code—notably Articles 184, 185, 196, 197, 198, and 199—which they consider contrary to constitutional provisions guaranteeing citizens’ fundamental freedoms, as set out in Articles 17, 18, 19, and 20 of the Constitution. Article 158 of the new Penal Code crystallizes concerns in particular. It provides that: “Shall be punished by the penalties provided for in Article 184-2° any person who, by one of the means referred to in that article: 1° glorifies crimes of murder, looting, arson or destruction of buildings, theft, crimes against the law of nations, and offenses provided for in Chapters 2 and 3 of this Title; 2° makes public calls with the aim of causing disapproval of Authority and provoking solidarity with one or more persons convicted of one of the offenses provided for by the preceding article or by the first paragraph of this article. The same penalties shall apply to anyone who organises collections for the purpose of paying pecuniary sentences imposed for one of these offenses.” Interpretation of this article may lead, depending on circumstances, to considering that a politician, journalist, or civil society actor cannot denounce or challenge a governmental or judicial decision without being accused of calling for “disapproval of Authority” of the State. In practical terms, denouncing the conviction of a political leader, contesting a prefectural order banning a demonstration, or calling for the reinstatement of a candidate on the electoral roll could expose their authors to judicial prosecution.

Articles 197 and 198 of the new Penal Code follow the same restrictive logic. Article 197 provides that: “Any person who publicly insults a minister of religion, by word, gesture, or writing, in the exercise of his ministry, shall be punished by imprisonment from six days to three months. Any person who commits acts of violence or assault against a minister of religion in the exercise of his ministry shall be punished by imprisonment from one month to two years.” Article 198 provides that: “Shall be punished by imprisonment from one to three years and a fine of 500,000 to 5,000,000 francs, those who have organized an undeclared or prohibited demonstration.” This article effectively puts an end to the declaratory principle governing marches/protests and enshrines the principle of prior authorization, thus constituting a notable democratic setback. From now on, the exercise of the right to demonstrate is subject to the discretion of the executive power.

Between 2020 and 2024⁸⁷, the Ivorian opposition operated in a tense political climate.⁸⁸ Attempts at political dialogue during this period ended in failure on key issues such as the release of political detainees, reform of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and revision of the electoral register. At the end of 2024, the opposition called for an audit of the electoral roll, citing numerous alleged irregularities, such as an abnormally high number of centenarians, deceased persons still appearing on the list of mothers with multiple children, or minors who are not eligible to vote, thereby fueling fears of a contested electoral process ahead of the 2025 presidential election.

87 https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/cote-divoire-prelim-110220-fr.pdf

88 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/cote-divoire/318-election-presidentielle-sous-tension-le-paradoxe-ivoirien>

THE 2025 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WITHOUT OPPOSITION LEADERS

The year 2025 began in a climate of silence and a total absence of dialogue between the government and the main opposition parties, casting doubt on the possibility of holding a peaceful and inclusive election.⁸⁹ Despite very different trajectories, the PDCI and the PPA-CI appeared as unavoidable forces, capable of influencing the balance of power and reshaping national political dynamics. The two parties have left a landmark on the Ivorian opposition landscape. The PDCI is the oldest active political party in Côte d'Ivoire, founded in 1946 by Félix Houphouët-Boigny. It remains one of the best-established parties in the country, relying on long-standing territorial roots that guarantee it electoral loyalty. The party has forged an image as a moderate, non-violent, and institutional political force, perceived as reassuring by part of the middle class and the economic elite. It benefits from a stable activist structure with experienced executives, local elected officials, and a well-organised apparatus. Since the death of Henri Konan Bédié in 2023, the party has entered a phase of internal reorganisation. Its electorate remains solid, particularly in the Central and Eastern regions. Since 2010, the PDCI has played the role of a “kingmaker,” having enabled Alassane Ouattara to access power through its alliance with the RDR. The party is led by Tidjane Thiam, a former CEO of Credit Suisse Group AG. Thiam has proved to be a formidable force. He is directly related to Houphouët-Boigny through his mother, a second cousin to the founding father. He returned to politics after running two Fortune 500 companies for 11 years, and being unanimously voted in as president of the PDCI.

The PPA-CI, although young, is driven by a charismatic leader, former president Gbagbo. Created in 2021 after his split from the FPI,

the PPA-CI quickly established itself as one of the most dynamic movements in the country thanks to Gbagbo's influence, intense activist mobilisation often visible during public rallies, and a strong ability to mobilise young people around a strong political identity. The PPA-CI retains strong mobilisation capacity in several regions, particularly in the West and the South. These two parties had the potential to change the balance within their coalition, the Common Front, which could push the presidential election into a second round. However, Gbagbo and Thiam did not appear on the electoral roll, due to court decisions issued less than ten months before the presidential election. Being absent from the electoral roll amounted to an inability to run as a candidate.

Article 48 of the Ivorian Electoral Code states that: “Any Ivorian who has the status of a voter may be elected President of the Republic under the conditions provided for by the Constitution and subject to the reservations set out below.” Yet voter status is acquired through registration on the electoral roll. Article 3 specifies: “Voters are Ivorians of both sexes and persons who have acquired Ivorian nationality either through naturalisation or marriage, aged eighteen years or older, registered on an electoral roll, enjoying their civil and political rights and not falling under any of the cases of incapacity provided for by law. The persons referred to in the preceding paragraph, living abroad and registered with a diplomatic or consular mission, may take part in the election of the President of the Republic under the conditions set by decree of the Council of Ministers, on the proposal of the body responsible for elections” (Article 3, Ivorian Electoral Code).

In addition to not being registered, the two opposition leaders were subject to judicial decisions. Article 49 specifies: “Are ineligible: persons deprived by judicial decision of their

89 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/318-cote-divoire.pdf>

right to eligibility; persons placed under judicial supervision.” With regard to Gbagbo, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison in absentia in the case of the “robbery” of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) in 2011. The case dates back to the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis. While Ouattara and Gbagbo were disputing power, a climate of institutional paralysis set in. Control over financial and military resources became a central issue. At the forefront of the economic battle was the BCEAO, several of whose branches located in areas controlled by forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo were forced to open their vaults. Large sums were withdrawn to finance the pro-Gbagbo administration, which was then isolated. Normal access to central bank resources was no longer possible for Gbagbo, as the BCEAO recognised Ouattara as the sole President of Côte d’Ivoire. In 2016, a trial opened in Abidjan against Gbagbo and some of his ministers for “aggravated theft,” “undermining the authority of the State,” and “embezzlement of public funds.” Gbagbo, then on trial before the International Criminal Court (ICC), was tried in absentia and sentenced to 20 years in prison and fined 329 billion CFA francs for “theft in a group by breaking and entering” and “embezzlement of public funds,” along with three of his ministers: Gilbert Aké N’Gbo, Désiré Dallo, and Koné Katinan. Gbagbo’s supporters claimed that this was a legal requisition to pay salaries and keep the State functioning. They denounced a “victors’ justice,” highlighting the vagueness of the material evidence, the prosecution’s inability to quantify the exact damage, and the evolution of Gbagbo’s trial in The Hague. As early as 2018, the weakness of the crimes against humanity charges brought against Gbagbo became evident, with some analysts predicting his release along with Charles Blé Goudé. According to activists, the Ouattara regime sought to “invent” a new conviction in order to bar Gbagbo from the 2025 presidential election.

For Tidjane Thiam, the court decision concerned his nationality. This issue recalls the scenario that prevented Ouattara from running for nearly twenty years, based on the concept of “Ivoirité” diverted for political

purposes. Introduced under the presidency of Henri Konan Bédié in the mid-1990s, this concept initially aimed to define Ivorian cultural uniqueness but became a tool to exclude Ouattara, who originated from the north of the country. Excluded in 1995 and again in 2000, Ouattara was portrayed as a “foreigner” responsible for political crises, fueling ethnic and regional tensions. Since that episode, the issue of nationality or Ivoirité has become sensitive during every presidential election. While some French collaborators of Ouattara who renounced their nationality under the same conditions as Thiam remained on the electoral roll, the PDCI president was excluded. Thirty years later, nationality issues resurfaced, risking dragging another political generation into the same pitfalls as the one that followed President Houphouët-Boigny. Relying on a law dating back to before Côte d’Ivoire’s independence in 1960, an Abidjan court indicated that the PDCI president had lost his Ivorian nationality in 1987 when he acquired French nationality. Thus, when Thiam registered on the electoral roll in 2022, he was no longer considered Ivorian under this judicial decision. The fact that he had renounced his French nationality on March 20, 2025, changed nothing.

Gbagbo and Thiam were not the only Ivorian politicians affected by ineligibility and excluded from the electoral process. Soro, president of Génération et Peuples Solidaires (GPS), was also affected by a series of convictions. A former rebel leader in the 2000s, former Prime Minister (2007–2012), and former President of the National Assembly (2012–2019), he was struck off the electoral roll due to multiple convictions. In 2020, he was sentenced in absentia to 20 years in prison for embezzlement of funds and money laundering. This sentence was accompanied by five years of deprivation of civic rights, including the right to vote and to stand for election, preventing him from running for president under Article 49 of the Electoral Code. In 2021, he was again sentenced to life imprisonment for undermining State security. That same year, the Ivorian judiciary ordered the dissolution of his party. Since late 2019, the Ivorian State had initiated proceedings against Soro, invoking serious charges. The judiciary also issued an international arrest

warrant against him, marking the beginning of a long judicial dispute involving accusations of “plot,” “destabilisation,” and “undermining State security.” His supporters denounced these measures as politically motivated. While the convictions barred Soro from the 2020 presidential race, his party was excluded from political life on June 23, 2021. The dissolution of GPS was pronounced by an Ivorian court on the grounds that the party constituted an “instrument” of Soro’s illegal actions in Côte d’Ivoire. GPS appealed the decision, but the dissolution was upheld. In 2025, Soro and his party were therefore outlawed within the Ivorian socio-political ecosystem. Neither the party president nor the party itself could participate in any political activity. The last Minister of Youth under Gbagbo, Charles Blé Goudé, prosecuted for crimes against humanity by the ICC, was also struck off the electoral roll. Upon his release from prison, the president of COJEP (Pan-African Congress for Justice and Equality of Peoples) made no secret of his desire to once again become a major political actor. Although acquitted by the ICC, he remained under the effect of a conviction handed down by the Ivorian judiciary.

In December 2019, Charles Blé Goudé was sentenced in absentia to twenty years in prison by an Ivorian court for “acts of torture,” “murder,” and “inhuman and degrading treatment.” He was found guilty of acts related to the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis, and his sentence includes the deprivation of civic rights — voting and eligibility — for a period of ten years.⁹⁰ Since the 2020 presidential election, the opposition has denounced a political instrumentalisation of the judiciary aimed at sidelining serious rivals of the incumbent. The context of Charles Blé Goudé’s conviction generated controversy. For the same charges for which he was acquitted by the ICC in 2019, the Ivorian judiciary convicted him. This decision was strongly contested and led his lawyers to denounce a violation of defense

rights. Although he was under conditional release in The Hague at the time, Blé Goudé was not authorised to attend his trial. Like Gbagbo and Soro, he denounced the political instrumentalisation of the judiciary aimed at excluding him from the political scene.

Regarding the candidate selection process, around sixty applications were transmitted by the Independent Electoral Commission to the Constitutional Council. Most files contained formal and substantive irregularities. One mandatory criterion imposed by Ivorian law, which many candidates failed to meet, is the mobilisation of sponsorship signatures. Each candidate was required to mobilise at least 1% of the electorate in 50% of the regions and/or autonomous districts (31 regions and the two autonomous districts of Abidjan and Yamoussoukro) nationwide. This provision was introduced to limit candidacies deemed frivolous. The law also specifies that an Ivorian may sponsor only one candidate in the locality, department, or region where he or she is registered. According to Article 51 of the Electoral Code: “Each candidate for the election of the President of the Republic is required to submit a declaration of candidacy bearing his duly legalized signature. In addition, he must be sponsored by a list of voters representing one percent (1%) of the local electorate, in at least fifty percent (50%) of autonomous districts and regions.”

One such opposition leader excluded under this provision was MP Assalé Tiémoko Antoine, mayor of Tiassalé and president of the movement Today and Tomorrow, Côte d’Ivoire (ADCI).⁹¹ His candidacy was declared inadmissible. The Constitutional Council observed that, in his application file, 11,345 national identity card numbers among declared sponsors were false. In addition, 213 sponsorships had been attributed to another candidate, which is formally prohibited by law: an Ivorian may sponsor only one candidate. Furthermore, 11,558 sponsorships were

90 <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20250604-presidentielle-cote-ivoire-quatre-candidats-opposition-exclus-election-thiam-gbagbo-bl%C3%A9-goud%C3%A9-soro>

91 <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250617-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-2025-en-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-le-d%C3%A9put%C3%A9-antoine-ti%C3%A9moko-assal%C3%A9-se-lance-en-ind%C3%A9pendant>

invalidated as false or duplicated. From the list submitted by the ADCI candidate, a total of 23,183 sponsorships were deemed valid, far below the 33,727 required. The deficit of 10,544 signatures was the main argument used by the Constitutional Council to invalidate his application. The party, which appeals to young voters, disputed the figures advanced by the Constitutional Council, stating that it submitted 41,906 sponsorships certified by a report to the Independent Electoral Commission, with a reserve of 3,000 signatures. According to party assessors, 7,165 sponsorships disappeared from the Constitutional Council's official count.⁹² ADCI claimed that the required sponsorship threshold should have been 35,336 signatures, not 33,727 as stated by the Council. Assalé Tiémoko, who successfully transitioned from journalism to politics, thus saw his first presidential attempt fail.

Another opposition candidate was also excluded for similar reasons. Pascal Affi N'Guessan, president of the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) — Laurent Gbagbo's former party — saw his application rejected due to irregularities in his sponsorship list. According to the Council's observations, the list contained 21,143 false national identity card numbers, 3,046 false voter numbers, and 1,966 identity or regional errors. Added to these errors were 2,405 duplicates and 1,065 sponsorships already attributed to another candidate. The total number of invalidated sponsorships thus amounted to 29,638, leaving the FPI candidate with only 16,908 sponsorships, well below the required 37,412, or 1% of the electorate in at least half of the regions and districts. These figures were contested by Pascal Affi N'Guessan, who stated that he submitted a total of 44,000 sponsorships in 20 regions, not 33 as indicated by the Constitutional Council. He claimed that the false sponsorships

resulted from falsification orchestrated by the Independent Electoral Commission. The FPI president announced his intention to file a complaint against unknown persons with the prosecutor for what he described as falsification, and to report "serious dysfunctions in the electoral roll" to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão.⁹³

The suspensions saw Ouattara's chances of remaining in power increase, but with a major risk: a call for a boycott that could trigger violence similar to that of 2020. The opposition denounced an "institutional coup," and former President Gbagbo spoke of an "electoral robbery,"⁹⁴ warning that it could reignite political and social tensions, with risks of violent protests in opposition strongholds. Some observers and political actors, both national and international, believed that allowing Ouattara to run again threatened the principle of political alternation. Indeed, he has already served several terms, including a third that led to violence in 2020. What made the debate over Ouattara's candidacy complex was the absence of a clear provision in the Ivorian Constitution explicitly prohibiting the accumulation of more than two terms. This constitutional "lock" now appears essential if the two-term limit is to be effectively upheld.

Other formal defects, such as failure to legalise documents, absence of birth certificates, lack of criminal record extracts, or tax compliance certificates, also led to the elimination of several independent candidates. In the end, only five candidates were approved by the Constitutional Council: incumbent President Ouattara, Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, Jean-Louis Billon, Ahoua Don Mello, and Henriette Lagou.⁹⁵

92 <https://www.pressecoatedivoire.fr/23307-rejet-de-la-candidature-dassale-tiemoko-aujourd'hui-et-demain-la-cote-divoire-deploire-des-incoherences-dans-les-chiffres-du-conseil-constitutionnel>

93 https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/pascal-affi-n-guessan-le-president-sortant-a-choisi-ses-adversaires-20-09-2025-2599097_3826.php

94 <https://www.lopinion.fr/international/presidentielle-ivoirienne-laurent-gbagbo-denonce-un-coup-detat-civil-et-un-braquage-electoral>

95 <https://eburnietoday.com/cote-divoire-ce-qu'il-faut-savoir-sur-les-cinq-candidats-en-lice-pour-la-presidentielle-doctobre-2025/>

The former First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, after her divorce in 2023, marked her political comeback in the presidential race with the movement she launched in 2022. Under the banner of the Movement of Capable Generations (MGC), she, who long remained in the shadow of her former husband, former President Gbagbo, played a central role in the election. Unlike Laurent Gbagbo, Simone Ehivet benefited from a presidential amnesty in 2018 upon her release from prison and was therefore registered on the electoral roll.⁹⁶ At 76 years old, she aspired to become one of the faces of the renewal of the Ivorian political class. Her political project was based on seven key commitments, aimed at a radical transformation of Côte d'Ivoire on social, economic, and security levels.

Another close associate of the former president was also approved by the Constitutional Council. Ahoua Don Mello⁹⁷, a loyal ally of Gbagbo, decided to enter the presidential race after the PPA-CI president was excluded. A former vice-president in charge of Pan-Africanism within the PPA-CI, he was dismissed after announcing his candidacy without his party's approval, which explains their split. At 67 years old, the public works engineer, former Minister of Equipment and Sanitation and former Director-General of the National Bureau of Technical Studies and Development (BNETD) for 11 years, presented himself as a "second chance" for the PPA-CI. Rejecting the policy of the empty chair, he positioned himself as a sovereigntist relying on human capital to strengthen Côte d'Ivoire's economic independence. Ahoua Don Mello also promoted multipolar cooperation to reduce the country's dependence on Western powers. His proximity to the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is well known. In 2022, he was appointed

Vice-President of the BRICS Alliance in charge of strategic projects, then, on May 6, 2022, Africa Representative of the organization. He called for a united opposition to block Ouattara.

The strategy of unity was also adopted by Jean-Louis Billon⁹⁸, another candidate excluded from his original party. A former Minister of Trade and head of the SIFCA Group, he announced his candidacy from his stronghold of Dabakala, a town in northern Côte d'Ivoire where he was a Member of Parliament. His candidacy was announced without the approval of his original political clan, the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), following the invalidation of Tidjane Thiam's and Laurent Gbagbo's candidacies. His supporters presented him as a credible alternative to rally the opposition around his slogan "Dare Change." Lacking official support from the main opposition parties, he ran under the banner of the Democratic Congress (CODE), a coalition of 18 parties and political movements, aiming to promote national reconciliation and a strong economic fabric.

Henriette Lagou⁹⁹ completed the list of approved candidates. At 66 years old, the former Minister of the Family, Women and Children, and Minister Delegate for Social Affairs in 2002, had already run in the 2015 presidential election, where she obtained 0.89% of the vote. In 2025, her candidacy was supported by the Group of Political Partners for Peace (GP-PAIX). A graduate of the National School of Administration (ENA), she advocated a "female-led" alternation of power management based on stability, the promotion of democratic values, and the well-being of Ivorians. Her policy emphasised national reconciliation and social cohesion, two central themes in the post-electoral context.

⁹⁶ <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/presidentielle-en-cote-divoire-simone-ehivet-ex-gbagbo-la-dame-de-fer-qui-espere-peser-sur-le-scrutin-2792401>

⁹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c4gpx4rprjno>

⁹⁸ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/10/30/cote-d-ivoire-apres-quinze-ans-de-reflexion-jean-louis-billon-se-lance-dans-la-course-a-la-presidentielle_6366451_3212.html

⁹⁹ <https://fr.africanews.com/2025/10/24/election-presidentielle-en-cote-divoire-lheure-des-femmes-a-sonne-selon-henriette-lagou/>

Faced with a fragmented yet renewed opposition, Ouattara, a candidate for a fourth term¹⁰⁰, justified his candidacy by the need to maintain national stability in the face of terrorist threats and regional economic uncertainties. He highlighted his economic record, which he described as “unassailable,” to reassure voters and maintain order in a context marked by the rise of jihadism in the Sahel and illicit activities along the northern borders.

The terrorist threat was and remains very real: it mainly comes from jihadist groups active in the Sahel, notably Katiba Macina (affiliated with JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). These groups operate in border areas with Burkina Faso and Mali, taking advantage of porous borders and local tensions. Côte d'Ivoire has already experienced several deadly attacks: on March 13, 2016, an attack in Grand-Bassam killed 22 people and injured 33. Between 2020 and 2021, several attacks against military positions in Kafolo and Kolobougou, as well as improvised explosive devices on the Nassian-Kafolo axis, caused around ten deaths and several injuries. Regional instability, reinforced by attacks in Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as illicit activities such as illegal gold mining, cattle theft, and cross-border trafficking, aggravate the threat. To address this, Côte d'Ivoire has strengthened security along its northern border, increased patrols and surveillance of strategic routes, and conducted targeted operations. The legal framework has also improved: Law No.

2015-493 of July 7, 2015 which concerns the repression of terrorism; Law No. 2018-864 of November 19, 2018 strengthens provisions, particularly regarding terrorist financing; and Law No. 2024-360 of June 11, 2024 reinforced maximum penalties, including life imprisonment for certain acts such as murder. The application of these laws also restricts journalists' movements: they must obtain authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior before traveling to the northern border zone, officially for security reasons.

After his election in 2010, following a post-electoral crisis that caused approximately 3,000 deaths, and his re-election in 2015, Alassane Ouattara sought and obtained a third term in 2020 following the sudden death of his designated successor, Amadou Gon Coulibaly. For the opposition, this succession of terms constituted a violation of the spirit and letter of the Constitution and resembled a forceful maneuver made possible by the judicial and administrative exclusion of the main opposition leaders from the electoral process. The presidential camp, however, rejected this interpretation. According to it, the 2016 constitutional revision, which marked Côte d'Ivoire's entry into the Third Republic, legally “reset the counters.” Under this interpretation, Alassane Ouattara's first term under the new Constitution would correspond to the period from 2020 to 2025, and the 2025 election would therefore represent a second and final term in accordance with the constitutional provisions in force.

100 https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/vu-de-guinee-en-briguant-un-quatrieme-mandat-le-president-ivoirien-ouattara-pietine-sa-parole-d-honneur_233589

AN ELECTION AMID VIOLENCE AND DISINFORMATION

During the electoral process of the October 2025 presidential election, four key narratives were mobilised to convey and spread disinformation on social media.¹⁰¹ These narratives aimed to create confusion and establish a crisis of confidence in the institutions responsible for organising the elections.¹⁰² The Ivorian presidential electoral process was structured into seven key stages. It began with the revision of the electoral list (1), continued with the collection of citizen endorsements and the submission of candidacies to the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) (2), the analysis of candidacy files and the validation of the final list of candidates by the Constitutional Council (3), the electoral campaign (4), the vote or polling (5), the proclamation of provisional results by the CEI (6), and ended with the proclamation of final results by the Constitutional Council (7).

Throughout this process, various informational attacks were reported. These informational attacks can be grouped into four main narratives. The first identified narrative was French interference. It was described through a military presence and political pressures aimed at installing a “Paris candidate” at the head of Côte d’Ivoire. The second narrative concerned the deterioration of the security situation, which, according to disinformation sources, manifested through terrorist attacks, attacks on polling stations, or the destruction of electoral materials.¹⁰³ False obituaries or false assaults targeting public

figures also constituted a theme exploited by various pages and accounts on social media to disrupt the Ivorian informational ecosystem. Finally, a last narrative concerned the alleged postponement and/or cancellation of the elections.¹⁰⁴

The historical ties between France and Côte d’Ivoire are very strong and remain privileged, particularly in the geopolitical context of Francophone West Africa, after which France was forced to leave Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.¹⁰⁵ Relations between Côte d’Ivoire and France, which remained intact, are strongly criticised by member countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Paris and Abidjan were repeatedly accused of attempts to destabilise AES member countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger). These accusations, put forward by the military regimes in power in these countries, found favorable resonance among cyber-activists. Thus, when the question of the nationality of candidate Tidjane Thiam made headlines, various pages and accounts tended to present the Ivorian banker as the “Paris candidate.” According to these narratives, France, brandishing the threat of an embargo, would be ready to impose sanctions on Côte d’Ivoire if “its candidate” were not declared eligible and registered on the electoral list. The method used to make this false political pressure from Paris credible consisted of impersonating the French newspaper *Le Monde diplomatique*.¹⁰⁶ The article attributed to this newspaper was false, and the media publicly denounced it.

101 <https://africacheck.org/fr/fact-checks/blog/presidentielle-civ-2025-role-medias-desinformation>

102 <https://factuel.afp.com/doc.afp.com.827269F>

103 <https://www.ivoirecheck.com/faux-aucune-de-ces-images-na-ete-prise-en-cote-divoir-e-en-2025/2025/10/24/-/257862/>

104 <https://www.ivoirecheck.com/faux-la-cei-na-pas-appelle-les-ivoiriens-a-ne-pas-se-rendre-aux-urnes-le-25-octobre/2025/10/23/-/257808/>

105 <https://fr.news.yahoo.com/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-arme-terroristes-162208565.html>

106 <https://eburnietoday.com/le-monde-diplomatique-na-jamais-revele-lingerence-de-la-france-dans-les-elections-ivoirienne-et-camerounaise-podcast/>

Other accusations then followed, supposedly revealing France's interference in the election. Côte d'Ivoire was then presented as a country incapable of ensuring electoral security, thereby soliciting Paris, which would react by sending 700 soldiers¹⁰⁷ as reinforcements. Using decontextualised images, a Facebook account based in Burkina Faso announced the arrival of these soldiers. This information was false, as was a supposed military training supervised by Sébastien Lecornu – then Minister of Defense – aimed at targeting Ivorian opponents.¹⁰⁸

On the military level, the interference narrative originated from the latest developments in security cooperation between Abidjan and Paris. France officially returned the 43rd Marine Infantry Battalion (BIMA), located at the Port-Bouët military camp, to the Ivorian army on Thursday, February 20, 2025. The French Minister of the Armed Forces, Sébastien Lecornu, and his Ivorian counterpart, Téné Birahima Ouattara, both recalled that military cooperation between the two countries would continue in other forms, notably in military intelligence, training, and equipment. This handover of the 43rd BIMA base did not escape disinformation. An activist close to the Ivorian opposition, Gbagbo Koné, thus claimed that the French soldiers were leaving Abidjan only to move to Bouaké. This narrative preceded the elections and intensified during the campaign and voting period.

In the pre-election context, the idea that Côte d'Ivoire was a fragile state hiding its failures was widely relayed by pro-AES pages. Imaginary terrorist attacks, the supposed presence of destabilising mercenaries based in Abidjan¹⁰⁹, and alleged clashes between supporters of Ouattara and Thiam circulated widely on the web. These informational attacks gained intensity in the electoral context, relying on a well-known

method: the use of decontextualised images. Decontextualising an image allows false information to circulate more widely and effectively than simple text. It is also easier for the general public to implement than creating fake images with artificial intelligence, whose tools remain complex for many users. Images and videos, mainly from press agencies (AFP, AP, Reuters, EPA) or local media, were thus used to illustrate alleged situations of violence or deterioration of the security situation. The banned opposition march in Côte d'Ivoire on October 11, 2025, was an emblematic case illustrating this disinformation strategy.¹¹⁰ Several images supposedly showing strong mobilisation of demonstrators, police repression of the march, and the death of at least three people, including a baby, were circulated by various accounts and pages on social media.

Two types of informational threats were identified during the electoral process in Côte d'Ivoire. On one hand, domestic manipulations carried out by influencers close to political parties, and on the other hand, foreign information manipulations (FIMI) orchestrated by pages and accounts located outside Côte d'Ivoire. In the context of this second threat, informational attacks came notably from neighboring countries, pages, and cyber-activists linked to the military regimes of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) member countries. The Ivorian presidential election thus constituted a textbook case in which domestic information manipulation fuels foreign information manipulation, and vice versa. This pattern was made possible by the existence of shared interests among actors involved in these two strategies. Their *modus operandi* relied on creating thousands of fake accounts on Facebook, TikTok, and X. These fake accounts were used for the massive dissemination of polarising content in multiple languages, with the narratives being identical, coordinated, and amplified

107 <https://factuel.afp.com/doc.afp.com.478X49D>

108 <https://eburnietoday.com/sebastien-lecornu-supervise-un-entrainement-militaire-ciblant-des-opposants-ivoiriens-trompeur/>

109 <https://factuel.afp.com/doc.afp.com.63M62NQ>

110 <https://factuel.afp.com/doc.afp.com.78R48WE>

to target candidates or institutions. Technical analyses converged in attributing these campaigns to national and international actors whose goal was to shape Ivorian public opinion at a politically decisive moment. To these external interference operations was added particularly active local disinformation, echoing point by point the characteristics of FIMI. Numerous manipulated videos, decontextualised images, and fake press or agency clippings circulated. These contents showed, for example, scenes of alleged violence at rallies, ballot boxes burnt in communes where no incident had been reported, or false statements attributed to political or religious figures calling for riots or boycotts. The virality of this content was reinforced by the high penetration of messaging applications, notably WhatsApp and Telegram, where groups of hundreds or even thousands of members form, remaining particularly difficult to monitor.

AN ELECTION DOMINATED BY THE RULING PARTY AMID VIOLENCE

As previously stated, the Constitutional Council invalidated, on September 8, 2025, the candidacies of Gbagbo and Thiam. These exclusions were perceived by the opposition as a sign of a “locked election”, thereby casting doubt on the inclusivity of the presidential election. At the official opening of the electoral campaign, on October 10, 2025, the opposition planned a protest march. This mobilisation aimed to demand an inclusive electoral process, to denounce the exclusion of the main opposition leaders from the vote, and to protest against Ouattara’s candidacy for a fourth term.¹¹¹ The march was organised by the Common Front. This was a political coalition bringing together Gbagbo’s PPA-CI and Thiam’s PDCI-RDA. The march planned for October 11, 2025, was to be the second initiative of this kind in a two-month period. The Common Front had already achieved strong mobilisation in its stronghold of

Yopougon, a popular district of Abidjan. On August 9, 2025, the Ivorian opposition managed to mobilise thousands of people during a march described as historic, the first authorised by the authorities since the electoral violence of 2020.¹¹²

Since the end of the October 2020 electoral process, marked by significant violence, the space for individual freedoms in Côte d’Ivoire was considerably reduced. Demonstrations, whether by the opposition or civil society, are now subject to prior authorisation from prefectural authorities. Between December 2020 and January 2025, no major opposition march was authorised. Only a few sporadic rallies allowed the Ivorian opposition to maintain a minimal level of mobilisation. The opposition march of August 9, 2025, in the commune of Yopougon in Abidjan also constituted a major event in the pre-electoral context, marked by tensions related to Ouattara’s decision to run for a fourth term. The march was praised as an example of democratic vitality, demonstrating the possibility of peaceful protest in Côte d’Ivoire. No major incidents were reported despite the large turnout. The opposition mobilised to contest Ouattara’s fourth term, deemed unconstitutional. The opposition also denounced the exclusion of major figures such as Gbagbo, Thiam, Soro, and Charles Blé Goudé, and to demand a reform of the CEI and inclusive elections. The mobilisation was a reminder that the Ivorian opposition still retained a real capacity for mobilisation. A signal which worried the ruling party, whose communication sought to minimise the scale of this demonstration.

For the Ivorian government, however, the second march planned for October 11, coinciding with the start of the presidential campaign, represented a serious risk of public order disturbances. The Prefecture of Abidjan banned the march through an order, citing the need to preserve stability during the electoral period. It also emphasised that

111 <https://mondafrique.com/politique/presidentielle-ivoirienne-la-marche-de-lopposition-de-ce-11-octobre-interdite/>

112 <https://fr.apanews.net/news/marche-de-lopposition-a-abidjan-pour-une-presidentielle-inclusive/>

the opposition had not submitted a formal prior request. However, the prohibition of the march did not deter opposition activists. They attempted to gather at various points in the Ivorian economic capital, as well as in other localities across the country. Security forces dispersed these gatherings using tear gas and carried out numerous arrests, including of minors. By October 12, the Ministry of the Interior announced about 710 arrests and one death in Bonoua. These figures were contested by the opposition, which claimed more than 1,000 people were arrested and detained in various locations. The public prosecutor announced the opening of investigations for “incitement to insurrection” and “threats to national security” in connection with the banned march.¹¹³ Officially, the ban on the second march was justified by security imperatives related to the start of the electoral campaign. The date of October 11 had not been chosen at random by the opposition. The march was scheduled to take place twenty-four hours after the official opening of the presidential campaign. Supporters of the five candidates in the race could thus have joined the streets of Abidjan alongside opposition activists calling for a boycott. The risk of clashes was real, reviving memories of the 1995 and 2020 scenarios.¹¹⁴ In 1995, the first active boycott of an election was launched by Laurent Gbagbo, then leader of the FPI, and Alassane Ouattara, head of the RDR. Both parties denounced a “tailor-made” election, called for a boycott of the vote, and for civil disobedience. In 2020, the FPI and PDCI joined forces to denounce Ouattara’s candidacy for a third term and to demand a transparent election respecting the Constitution. During each of these boycott periods, violence caused significant material damage, numerous injuries, and loss of life. The incidents of October 11 led the Ivorian authorities to further restrict civil and political freedoms. An interministerial order,

signed on October 17, 2025, by the Ministers of the Interior and Defense, prohibited any demonstrations for two months. From October 17 to December 17, 2025, only gatherings directly related to the campaigns of the candidates in the race and authorised by the CEI could take place. In this context, with an excluded and silenced opposition under laws consolidated by the regime between 2016 and 2022, the RHDP appeared as the clear favorite to win the presidential election.

Ouattara’s party dominated the campaign thanks to a team of 439 senior officials. This team included 13 deputy directors, 17 central directors, 47 regional directors, and 350 departmental directors.¹¹⁵ The campaign was coordinated by a Strategic Guidance Committee chaired by Vice-President Tiémoko Meyliet Koné.¹¹⁶ This committee brought together 19 influential personalities, including several ministers. The stated goal was to enable the incumbent president to win the election in the first round. The “knockout” strategy remains controversial. For the ruling party, it reflected the desire to ensure an immediate electoral landslide. This logic led the RHDP to mobilise nearly 1,300 actors to conduct the electoral campaign. The party focused on mobilising youth, encouraging the massive withdrawal of voter cards, and occupying the field through large rallies in major cities. For the opposition, the “knockout” strategy concealed the incumbent president’s intention to stay in power by any means. Convinced that he had eliminated his most serious rivals through “controlled justice,” Ouattara appeared confident about his re-election given the resources deployed. The opposition denounced a campaign largely conducted with state resources.

The program proposed by Ouattara was based on his candidacy speech, which relied

¹¹³ afrikipresse.fr/article/marche-non-autorisee-du-11-octobre-2025-le-procureur-de-la-republique-fait-la-lumiere

¹¹⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2021/06/afr310011996fr.pdf>

¹¹⁵ <https://cinews.ci/presidentielle-2025-voici-les-hommes-du-rhdp-designes-pour-diriger-la-campagne-de-ouattara/>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.rhdpofficiel.ci/actualites/election-presidentielle-2025-lequipe-de-campagne-rhdp-prete-pour-une-victoire-eclatante>

on six pillars.¹¹⁷ The program combined the classic axes of peace, security, and stability with new challenges related to digital and ecological transitions. The promotion of human capital through better health and education, modernisation of agriculture, and industrial innovation were other major pillars of Ouattara's political project. While the other candidates in the race mobilised barely a few hundred people during their meetings, the RHDP occupied both media space and the field thanks to financial and logistical resources far superior to those of its competitors. The incumbent had a larger number of billboards and campaign trucks, his campaign teams enjoyed privileged access to public media, and the RHDP relied on its strong territorial base in northern Côte d'Ivoire. The ruling party's rallies mobilised thousands of people, such as those organised in Yopougon on October 14, Cocody on October 13, and in Plateau, Place de la République, on October 23. At each of these gatherings, the Ivorian president or his campaign teams focused on themes particularly important to youth, such as job creation, industrialisation, social cohesion, and digital transformation. Faced with this political offensive from the ruling party, the opposition, weakened by the exclusion of major figures, called for a boycott of the vote. The African Peoples Party – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI) thus called on its militants not to go to the polls. Gbagbo, party president, called the vote an "electoral robbery" and denounced the bias of the institutions responsible for organising the elections. The Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) did not present a candidate to replace its president Thiam, who had been excluded from the vote. The party gave no clear voting instructions, leaving its members divided between abstention and the desire to choose another candidate among Ouattara's four opponents. The ADCI (Today and Tomorrow, Côte d'Ivoire), an opposition political movement whose president Assalé Tiémoko Antoine had his candidacy rejected by the Constitutional Council, also refused to support

the candidates in the race and denounced a "muzzled" election. The presidential campaign, held from October 10 to 23, 2025, took place in a climate of tension and disinformation.

Throughout the campaign period, rumors and disinformation campaigns notably targeted the fraudulent use of party logos to disseminate alarming messages. Fake communiqués targeted all political parties to create confusion within public opinion. Another disinformation narrative concerned the alleged cancellation of the elections. During the campaign, various pages and accounts on social media claimed that the United Nations would not recognise the election results. This narrative was based both on the certification role played by the UN during the October 2010 presidential election and on the fact that Thiam, had indeed appealed to the UN Human Rights Committee after being removed from the electoral list by the Ivorian judiciary on April 22, 2025. The Committee, however, did not grant interim measures and therefore issued no immediate injunction for Thiam's re-registration. However, the Committee invited Côte d'Ivoire to take all "necessary measures to guarantee his political rights" as long as the request was under review. At no time did the United Nations call for the cancellation of the presidential election or refuse to recognise the election results.

The five candidates in the race – Ouattara (RHDP), Simone Ehivet Gbagbo (MGC), Jean-Louis Billon (CODE), Ahoua Don Mello (Independent), and Henriette Lagou Adjoua (GP-PAIX) – focused their campaigns on topics considered dominant and a priority by Ivorians. High cost of living and purchasing power occupied a central place, in a context marked by inflation and uncontrolled food prices on markets. The issue of youth employment also recurred, accompanied by promises of economic and industrial reforms. The security challenge, particularly the fight against terrorism and cross-border crime, was

¹¹⁷ <https://www.pressecoatedivoire.fr/23551-presidentielle-2025-les-six-piliers-du-programme-dalassane-ouattara-devoiles>

among the major concerns highlighted by the candidates. Finally, the topic of national reconciliation, after the post-electoral crises of 2010 and 2020,¹¹⁸ was once again at the heart of debates and political proposals. When the first round of the Ivorian presidential election was held on October 25, the impressive mobilisation of security forces raised fears of violence similar to previous electoral episodes.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire launched Operation "Espérance,"¹¹⁹ a security deployment to ensure the protection of the election. In practice, this operation aimed to guarantee a calm and secure electoral process in a particularly tense political, social, and security context. The goal of this security operation was to prevent and contain all forms of violence throughout the electoral process, ensure the safety of the population and electoral activities, and deter any attempts to disrupt the vote. The deployment was planned from October 5 to November 4, 2025, with the possibility of extension in case of a second round. The deployed forces were supported by armored vehicles, troop carriers, and crowd control equipment.

Since Ouattara came to power, the Ivorian army has not been discreet, sometimes drawing criticism for its methods of intervention. The massive presence of security forces, especially in major cities during the presidential election, was one of the most commented elements by national observers. Some voters considered this presence reassuring, while another segment of the population did not share this view. For the latter, this presence was perceived as "deterrent," capable of intimidating voters and reinforcing a climate of fear. The feeling of distrust was notably linked to the key role played by the army in repressing opposition militants and officials between 2020 and 2024. Despite the massive deployment of security forces, deadly violence was reported in several localities of Côte d'Ivoire.

Opposition parties called for boycotts and marches, while social media was flooded with hate speech and a wave of disinformation. Hate speech has been recurring in the Ivorian political arena, especially during elections. During the first major opposition rally, on August 16, 2025, militants chanted slogans hostile to President Ouattara, calling him a "little Mossi." The term "Mossi," which designates the majority ethnic group in Burkina Faso, is presented by some as that of President Ouattara. The expression "little Mossi" refers to historical divisions and an identity-based rhetoric according to which "Alassane Ouattara is Burkinabé" and therefore "a foreigner." This xenophobic rhetoric, already observed in previous electoral periods, resurfaced in political debate. In this context, the term "Mossi" became, under politicisation, an identity marker associated with unrest and tensions. Historically, many Mossis migrated to Côte d'Ivoire to work in agriculture or as laborers, sometimes giving rise to stereotypes linked to poverty or a perceived lower social status. The addition of the qualifier "little" reinforces the derogatory nature of the expression, suggesting a subordinate position or lack of prestige, despite Ouattara being President of the Republic.

The incumbent president also fueled the controversy with what was described as the "allegory of dogs." In the electoral debate, this expression aimed to designate and dehumanise his political opponents. This type of qualifier is identified as having a provocative effect and has been strongly condemned by civil society, which sees it as an aggravating factor in political and social tensions. Faced with this climate, the Ivorian army stated its intention to prevent and deter acts of electoral violence, risks of sabotage, and attacks against personnel and electoral materials, while avoiding public disorder.

Operation "Espérance" mobilised a total of 44,000 defense and security forces, including 18,000 gendarmes, 18,000 police officers,

118 <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251022-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-en-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-la-vie-ch%C3%A8re-l-emploi-et-la-s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9-au-c%C5%93ur-du-scrutin>

119 <https://french.news.cn/20251003/5c5923d498a84b42a45fc35134090c37/c.html>

and 8,000 military personnel.¹²⁰ The adopted security strategy aimed to cover the entire national territory, with particular attention to strategic points such as polling stations, road axes, and sensitive areas, such as localities where, in the past, electoral tensions had led to serious violence.

Another major focus concerned digital security. Enhanced monitoring of social media was deemed essential to counter disinformation, hate speech, and calls for violence.¹²¹ In practice, the army benefited from a series of associated measures facilitating its actions. Among the main measures were the ban on marches and public demonstrations for a period of two months, except for activities authorized by the CEI, as well as coordination with the CEI to secure the transport and storage of electoral materials.¹²² Despite this setup, outbreaks of violence occurred in several regions of the country between October 20 and 25, 2025. In certain localities in the Southeast and West, several road blockages using tree trunks were reported. In Yamoussoukro, the political capital of Côte d'Ivoire, the local headquarters of the Independent Electoral Commission was vandalised and then set on fire. Intercommunal clashes related to

the boycott were also recorded in several areas, notably in Haut-Sassandra, Nahio¹²³, and Zoukougbeu, causing deaths, gunshot injuries, and the burning of houses. Attacks targeting security forces and administrative or electoral authorities resulted, on October 20, 2025, in the death of Second Lieutenant Klenon Lassina Daniogo, a gendarmerie officer serving at the Agboville¹²⁴ squadron. Furthermore, a targeted sabotage act hit an energy supplier on the night of October 23-24 in Avagou, near Jacqueville. The attempted fire in the gas transfer chamber of the FOXTROT company was classified as a terrorist act by Ivorian authorities. Foiled in time, this attempt aimed to destabilise the electoral process and create tension on voting day. According to initial investigation elements, the assailants' modus operandi relied on the use of Molotov cocktails to start a fire potentially reaching the offshore gas platform of Vridi. Had the attack succeeded, the damage would have been described as "incalculable" due to the particularly sensitive nature of the site. Seven suspects were arrested in Sassako-Bégniny. The main alleged organiser was Lobo Tevy Degny Germain, alias "Volcan." The objective of this sabotage operation was to create a climate of terror and prevent the holding of the presidential election on October 25, 2025.

120 <https://www.lemeridien.ci/securisation-de-la-presidentielle-doctobre-2025-44-000-agents-des-forces-de-defense-et-de-securite-mobilises/>

121 <https://disinfo.africa/les-%C3%A9lections-de-2025-en-c%C3%B4te-divoire-en-proie-%C3%A0-la-d%C3%A9sinformation-e38593abc910>

122 <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-le-gouvernement-interdit-les-manifestations-politiques-pour-deux-mois/3720311>

123 <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20251030-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-que-sait-on-violences-meurtri%C3%A8res-nahio>

124 <https://africacheck.org/fr/fact-checks/blog/imbroglio-deces-enregistres-manifestations-election-2025>

The main incidents signaled between October 20 and 25 are summarised below in Table 1.

Date	Location	Nature of incidents and casualties
20 October	Agboville–Azaguié road axis (southern Côte d'Ivoire)	A shooting occurred between gendarmes and unidentified armed people during a security patrol. Second Lieutenant Klenon Lassina Daniogo, serving with the Agboville squadron, was struck in the shoulder and abdomen by gunfire and later succumbed to his injuries. The patrol was attacked by armed and hooded people who had erected barricades to block the road. The attackers had planned to paralyse traffic, and some were armed with 12-gauge shotguns, machetes, and Kalashnikovs. According to preliminary findings, the ambush was linked to protests against Ouattara's bid for a fourth term.
	Yamoussoukro	Clashes were reported in the Assabou neighbourhood between opposition protesters and the ruling party members. Police attempted to restore calm with tear gas. Looting took place at the Attiéguakro bus station, where several shops were vandalised. The local CEI office was set on fire.
	Gagnoa, Garahio market area	Protesters set up roadblocks around the Garahio market. Security forces dispersed them using tear gas.
21 October	Yamoussoukro	One individual died after being struck by a stone thrown by protesters while assisting the gendarmerie in removing barricades erected by youth groups demonstrating against the Ouattara's fourth term bid. Intercommunal violence between young Baoulé and Malinké residents was reported. Tidjane Thiam, president of PDCI, belongs to the Baoulé ethnic group, while Ouattara is identified as member of the Malinké tribe. Protesters assumed that those who are members of these different groups belong automatically to the political parties of the two leaders. Initial clashes in Yirikro quickly spread to Habitat, 220 Logements, and Assabou. Reinforcements from both communities continued converging on Yirikro, where tensions remained high. Security forces attempted to contain and disperse the rival groups.
	Agboville	In the sub-prefecture of Lovigué, individuals forced students out of the primary school groups 1–3 and 2–4, as well as the Lovigué secondary school. Gendarmerie forces instructed distribution agents to temporarily suspend operations.
	Sinfra Department, Marahoué Region	At EPP Dienembroufla (Kononfla sub-prefecture), a distribution agent was assaulted and injured by unidentified individuals who also ransacked and stole electoral materials, severely disrupting the process.
	Agnéby-Tiassa Region	In Aboudé, protesters blocked the roads. Schools progressively emptied as a result. Dozens of young people decided to carry out the boycott call issued by the opposition. Security forces advised electoral agents to withdraw for safety reasons. Affected distribution centres: EPP 1 Aboudé Kouassikro, EPP 2 Aboudé Kouassikro, and EPP Boa-Vincent.
	Man, Tonkpi Region	Students at Lycée Municipal Florent Dro Jacquet demanded suspension of classes until after the 25 October election. Some threw stones onto school roofs to force others to leave class. Security forces intervened with tear gas to disperse them, pursuing several students into nearby neighbourhoods.
	Sinfra Department	In Bazré, students were forced out of local schools. Distribution operations by team 06 LV were suspended as a precaution.
23 October	Guitry Department	In Lauzoua, the CEI office was set on fire around 22:47 by unidentified individuals. All materials inside were destroyed. Gendarmes arrived to conduct routine investigations.
	Dabou Department	In Bouboury village (between 2 and 3 a.m.), unidentified individuals set fire to five parked trucks, one of which were broken down. The resulting obstruction disrupted traffic. Gendarmerie and the Civil Protection Centre intervened to clear the road.
	Gagnoa Department	In Gnagbodougnoa around 11 a.m., a distribution agent was assaulted by unidentified attackers who stole all electoral material, including the phone used for communication. The agent was unharmed.
	Daoukro	Around 11 a.m., students forced their classmates out of Lycée HKB 1 and 2. Security forces intervened, but students resisted and threw stones. Several students were arrested after a foot chase.

24 October	Taabo village	Protesters erected barricades blocking all access roads, disrupting movement. The incident was related to a land dispute and not to the electoral process.
	Tiébissou	Reports indicated planned demonstrations by young people close to the opposition. Electoral materials were pre-emptively secured at the gendarmerie brigade.
	Gnagbodougnoa	Around 8 a.m., protesters arrived at the CEL office. After asking the guard to open the doors and seeing no electoral materials inside, they left.
	Yopougon	In Niangon Nord (left side), near the Benoît pharmacy, youths attempting to march toward the social centre around 11 a.m. were dispersed with tear gas.
	Zégo (Divo Department)	Amid a deteriorating security situation, marked by hostile protesters and barricades preventing access even to security forces, the CESP head decided—together with military and administrative authorities—to relocate the CEL and electoral materials to Goudi. The transfer took place overnight under gendarmerie escort. Authorities also recommended regrouping certain polling stations and reinforcing security for voters as security forces in the area are not enough.
	Bassa and Niezeko, Kebe canton (Sassandra)	Village residents refused to participate in professional elections because their preferred candidate was not on the voter list. CEI agents expressed fear and were reluctant to deploy on 25 October.
	Dayiro Didizo (Guirya Department) and Divo Department	Relay agents refused to report to their assigned posts due to security concerns. Rumors of attacks against electoral personnel spread in both localities.
25 October	Kokumbo (Toumodi Department)	Protesters felled trees to block the main road linking Kokumbo to neighbouring towns. Traffic was temporarily paralysed. Gendarmerie forces intervened to restore order and clear the road.
	Bogogoua School Group (LV)	Around 06:45, unidentified individuals stole the ballot box and electoral documents.
	Douseba Village (Zikisso)	Protesters erected barricades blocking access routes, preventing residents from reaching the following polling stations: LV Groupe Scolaire Douseba, EPP Besseboua, EPP Krikpoko, and EPP Goudou. Protesters close to the opposition mentioned that there would be no vote as long as opposition leaders were excluded from the electoral process.
	Didi Sub-prefecture – Gobioko School Group	Around 07:00, unidentified individuals stole the voting booth.
	Kpouèbo (Toumodi Department)	The CEI office was set on fire, but electoral materials were not damaged. Polling stations opened as planned.
	Facobly – EPP Kirao 1	Access to the centre was barricaded and staff were forced out. Electoral material was however secured. The CESP requested security reinforcements.
	Attoutou (Jacqueville Department)	Ballot boxes from polling stations 1 and 2 were stolen by unidentified individuals.
	Douzéba (Lakota Department)	Access roads were blocked to prevent residents from voting. All polling stations were closed.
	Diapé	All voting centres were closed due to violence. Electoral materials were secured at the Agou CEL. One electoral agent was assaulted.
	Oumé	Ballot boxes were stolen from three centres: EPP Akroufla, EPP N'Da N'Guessankro, and EPP Akroufla UAU. Four polling stations were inaccessible due to blockades: EPP Gnanoufla, EPP Dougbafla 1, EPP Dougbafla 2, and EPP Bemakro.
	Bouaflé (Pakouébo Sub-prefecture)	A group of youths stormed the GS Nanann N'Dri Yoman polling site and burnt electoral material. They then erected roadblocks. All voting centres were temporarily closed.

Grand-Zattry (Nawa Region)	Thirteen polling stations were vandalised, including: EPP Gbisso, Oureyo BV 1 and 2, Gbaleguhe, Blesseoua, Gadago, Mavou, Gouabouo, Aboikouamekro, Koreguhe, Pierrekro (Blesseoua), Zougouzoa, and SerigbanganEn Commune, EPP Kipiri.
Gbolouville (Tiassalé Department)	The local CEI office was ransacked around 7 a.m. Polling centres were closed. No voting took place.
Dabou – Toupah – Vieux-Badien village	Around 10:15, unidentified individuals burnt electoral material, halting the vote. The sole gendarme assigned to secure the site was attacked by protesters.
Anyama – EPP Anyama-Adjamé	Materials from five polling stations were vandalised and four tablets were stolen.
Toulepleu – Méo Sub-prefecture	During the night of 25–26 October, the aunt of the Sub-prefectural Electoral Commission (CESP) President was found murdered (throat slit) in her home.
Issia/Nahio	Around 18:30, clashes broke out between protesters from the Front Commun and RHDP supporters. Gendarmerie forces intervened. Casualties: 3 dead, 19 injured, and several houses burnt.

The official report on the violence related to the October 2025 presidential election, compiled by the National Security Council (CNS) on November 13, 2025, reported 11 deaths, 71 injuries, significant material damage, and 1,658 arrests.¹²⁵ According to the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) and the Constitutional Council¹²⁶, the violence did not undermine the credibility of the election or the election results. The voter turnout was officially put at 50.10%, after 4,292,474 people voted out of 8,568,456 registered voters. The number of spoilt ballots amounted to 105,156 and blank ballots to 66,788. Valid votes stood at 4,187,318.

Election observation missions were authorised to monitor proceedings at polling stations including the counting and announcement of results, both at the polling station level and nationally. They reported several types of incidents and irregularities. These included the insufficiency of indelible ink for marking voters' fingers, the late opening of certain polling stations, the lack of tactile ballots for visually impaired voters,

as well as the poor configuration of some polling stations, compromising ballot secrecy, notably due to poorly positioned voting booths. Observers also noted the absence of provisions allowing persons with disabilities to access polling stations. Other irregularities involved voters who could not find their names on electoral rolls on voting day, people surprised to find that a vote had already been registered in their name when they had just arrived at their polling stations, or spelling errors on names that prevented some Ivorians from voting.

In various localities, voting was disrupted by individuals claiming affiliation with the opposition. The exclusion of their political leaders led them to oppose the electoral process “by all means.” Attacks against electoral agents, destruction of electoral materials, as well as attacks targeting security agents were reported by several observation missions. Regarding the integrity of the vote and results¹²⁷, it was difficult to collect the views of candidates whose applications were rejected by the Constitutional Council.

¹²⁵ <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-11-morts-et-1-658-interpellations-dans-les-troubles-pendant-la-pr%C3%A9sidentielle/3743462>

¹²⁶ <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.ci/archives-et-decisions/decision-ndeg-ci-2025-ep-00704-11ccsg-du-04-novembre-2025-portant-proclamation>

¹²⁷ https://cei.ci/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/EPR_2025_RESULTAT_NATIONAL.pdf

Observers noted, however, that only the RHDP candidate had representatives in almost all polling stations. The other four candidates were unable to mobilise enough representatives.

The incumbent Ouattara (RHDP), running for re-election, obtained 89.77% of the votes, totaling 3,759,030. He was followed by Jean Louis Billon (CODE) with 3.09% of the votes (129,493). Simone Ehivet Gbagbo (MGC) was placed third with 2.42% of the votes (101,238). Ahoua Don Mellon, an independent candidate, and Henriette Lagou (GP-PAIX) occupied fourth and fifth place with 1.97% and 1.15% of the votes, respectively.

Overall, the election observation missions deployed nationwide praised the orderly conduct of the election.¹²⁸ The most significant international mission was jointly conducted by ECOWAS and the AU.¹²⁹ It deployed 255 observers, including 15 long-term and 240 short-term observers. These observers, from 28 African countries as well as ECOWAS and AU institutions, were deployed across all districts of Côte d'Ivoire under the supervision of former Nigerian Vice President, Professor Oluyemi Oluleke Osinbajo.

The Conseil de l'Entente deployed about fifty observers with a particular focus on security. The Conseil de l'Entente is a sub-regional organisation comprising Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger, and Togo. Under the leadership of Afo Salifou Ousmane, the organisation conducted an election observation mission aimed at monitoring the elections, verifying the security and legal arrangements in place, demonstrating regional solidarity, and strengthening confidence in the democratic process. Fifty observers were deployed between Abidjan and the interior of the country. The mission included meetings with national authorities,

notably the Ministry of the Interior, the Independent Electoral Commission, and the Constitutional Council. Observation took place before, during, and after the vote. At the end of the mission, the Conseil de l'Entente urged Ivorian authorities to reinforce electoral security by maintaining robust measures before, during, and after the vote, ensure the transparency of the electoral process through rapid and clear publication of results, and encourage consultation among political actors to reduce tensions and implement consensual and constructive electoral reforms.

At the national level, the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) deployed the largest number of observers, with 400 observers in the Abidjan district and 1,950 in the 516 sub-prefectures across the country.¹³⁰ Overall, these missions aimed to monitor the electoral process before, during, and after the election, alert the government to potential incidents, and make recommendations to prevent conflicts and establish a climate of trust and transparency.

The CNDH's election observation mission in Côte d'Ivoire specifically aimed to evaluate respect for civil and political rights throughout the electoral process. Deployment involved 2,350 observers across 31 regions and the two autonomous districts of Abidjan and Yamoussoukro. Observers used a digital platform, "CNDH RCI Early Alert," to report incidents in real time. The CNDH maintained a presence in 9,400 polling sites out of 11,835, covering about 79.4%, and in 18,800 polling stations out of 25,370, about 79.16%.

The main finding of the organisation concerned the overall context of the election and the human rights framework. The CNDH noted the massive invalidation of candidacies (55 out of 60 applications rejected), the opposition boycott, as well as increased political demonstrations and tensions between October 11 and 14, 2025,

128 <https://fr.apanews.net/news/rci-la-cedeao-et-lua-jugent-globalement-satisfaisant-le-scrutin-presidentiel/>

129 <https://www.peaceau.org/fr/article/declaration-d-arrivee-communique-conjoint-des-missions-d-observation-electorale-de-la-cedeao-et-de-l-union-africaine-pour-l-election-presidentielle-du-25-octobre-2025-en-republique-de-cote-d-ivoire>

130 <https://www.aip.ci/272682/cote-divoire-aip-presidentielle-2025-le-scrutin-sest-globalement-deroule-dans-un-climat-serein-selon-le-cndh/>

which caused at least six deaths, multiple injuries, and arrests. In its conclusions, the CNDH stressed that the election generally took place in a calm environment consistent with human rights, despite certain incidents. These included late openings in 35% of polling stations, mainly due to late material delivery and security constraints, 129 vandalised ballot boxes, 71 polling sites not opened, and 212 incidents, including destruction of materials, assaults, and obstruction of voting. Thanks to the early warning system, 80% of identified problems were resolved.

In its recommendations, the council called for the establishment of inclusive dialogue and consultation between the government, the CEI, political parties, and civil society. It urged authorities to guarantee fundamental freedoms throughout the electoral cycle and to pursue legal reforms to harmonise electoral legislation with texts related to women's representation. It also recommended the implementation of effective mechanisms to combat hate speech and disinformation.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: NEITHER INTERFERENCE NOR INDIFFERENCE

Since the end of the post-electoral crisis in 2011 and Ouattara's rise to power, the "interference" of the international community in Ivorian political affairs has been discreet. France and the UN played a controversial role in the Ivorian crisis of 2002-2011.¹³¹ Their engagement was marked by military and diplomatic actions.

The crisis began on September 19, 2002, with an armed rebellion against Gbagbo. The country was quickly divided: the North controlled by the New Forces (rebels) and the South by the loyalist forces (FANCI). It was in this context and at the request of President Gbagbo that France deployed Operation Licorne in 2002 to protect its nationals and support stabilisation. It also played a role in mediating the Linas-Marcoussis Agreements (January 2003), imposing a reconciliation government which included the rebels. Accusations of interference and neocolonialism began to be directed at France after the failure of Operation César launched by the Ivorian army. This operation, renamed "Operation Dignity," led to an incident with still unclear contours. The bombing of a French base in Bouaké led to the destruction of the Ivorian air force by France in November 2004. These events sparked anti-French riots in Abidjan and deaths among civilians. France was seen by part of the Ivorian population as the "true instigator" and "main supporter" of the rebellion. France was perceived as having economic and strategic interests in Côte d'Ivoire, which fueled suspicion about the neutrality of its intervention. The UN experienced a situation similar to that of France. It established UNOCI, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, in 2004 to supervise the ceasefire, disarm militias, and organise elections. UNOCI was accused of partiality in favor of Ouattara during the

post-electoral crisis of 2010-2011. The United Nations operation, with the support of French forces, participated in military attacks against pro-Gbagbo forces in April 2011, which raised debate about the legitimacy of its peacekeeping mandate. These interventions left an ambivalent image.

France, far from having played the role of mediator, was accused of interference and of promoting Françafrique, an old politico-economic system aimed at maintaining control over the economy of its former colonies. When the diplomatic situation between Paris and the AES member countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) deteriorated, Gbagbo's supporters saw this as a continuation of their leader's sovereignty struggle, as he was the first to confront France. This approach stems from criticisms of the role of France¹³² and the UN in the Ivorian crisis from 2002 to 2010.¹³³ The return of stability in Côte d'Ivoire repositioned the country as a preferred destination for foreign investors. Côte d'Ivoire regained the confidence of donors and positioned itself as one of the last strategic allies of Western countries in West Africa. France, and more broadly Western countries intervening in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region, were pushed out by the AES member countries (Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso). Russia became a significant ally for these countries in their sovereignty ambitions and in diversifying their military and diplomatic partnerships.

131 <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-les-champs-de-mars-ldm-2005-1-page-53?lang=fr>

132 <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-relations-internationales-2018-3-page-93?lang=fr>

133 <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-les-champs-de-mars-ldm-2005-1-page-53?lang=fr>

Côte d'Ivoire, which continues to maintain excellent relations with France, the United States, and EU member states, positions itself as a reliable ally in the fight against terrorism and as a strategic partner due to its geographical position. It is a coastal country with a northern opening to the Sahel region. The maintenance of its partnership is reflected in a future joint France-U.S. base in Bouaké. The two powers, forced out of AES member countries, will be able to continue fighting terrorism from Côte d'Ivoire. The country remains one of the last strategic partners of Western countries in West Africa, but the dynamics are rapidly evolving. The partnership takes the form of technical assistance in a spirit of independence. Long criticized as a symbol of French domination, the French military base of Port-Bouët, home to the 43rd BIMA, was returned to the Ivorian army in February 2025. This decision marks the end of a direct French military presence in Côte d'Ivoire, as part of France's gradual withdrawal from the Sahel and West Africa.

Despite the handover, Abidjan maintains military cooperation with Paris: around one hundred French soldiers will remain for training and support missions. Economically, France is no longer Côte d'Ivoire's primary partner. China is the country's largest bilateral trading partner, followed by the European Union as the main economic partnership zone with Côte d'Ivoire. The United States and France remain historical allies but now exert more influence in the military and diplomatic spheres than in politics, despite the substantial development aid they continue to provide. The sub-region has experienced significant geopolitical changes in recent years. Despite elections marked by violence, Côte d'Ivoire has avoided the wave of military coups that have occurred in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea.¹³⁴ It has regained its role as a pivot for regional stability through

a security partnership it has maintained mainly with France and the United States in the fight against terrorism. This is no longer the case with Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which have formed a unique socio-political entity, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).¹³⁵ It is a confederation created on July 6, 2024, in Niger's capital (Niamey). Originally, it took the form of a mutual defense pact, as the three countries face armed groups carrying out jihadist attacks across the long Sahelian strip they share. The Liptako-Gourma Charter¹³⁶, signed on September 16, 2023, is the founding act of this alliance led by military juntas. AES member countries left ECOWAS in January 2024. The triptych "Defense, Diplomacy, Development" defines this alliance, emphasising its sovereignty vis-à-vis Western powers. This stance has led to a military and political break with France and the United States. Instead, these three countries turned to Russia and other emerging powers such as China and Turkey to strengthen their armies against ongoing security threats, terrorism, and trafficking.¹³⁷

After the handover of the 43rd BIMA base in Abidjan to Côte d'Ivoire, France now has only two permanent bases in Africa: one in Gabon and the other in Djibouti. While Paris reduced its military footprint on the continent, other actors such as Russia and China are strengthening their military presence. Despite the handover, Abidjan maintains military cooperation with Paris: around one hundred French soldiers will remain for training and support missions. Côte d'Ivoire plays a crucial role in the fight against jihadist groups threatening the Sahel and the northern coastal countries. Ivorian soldiers were part of the National Support Elements (NSE), tasked with providing logistical support to MINUSMA and securing sites for the German contingent. This cooperation was approved by the UN since 2019. The port and airport of Abidjan

134 <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-coups-detat-of-the-sahel-region-domestic-causes-and-international-competition/>

135 <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/alliance-etats-sahel-une-configuration-emergente-souverainete-securitaire-afrique-ouest-2025>

136 <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/sahel2023.htm>

137 <https://www.trtafrika.com/francais/article/b1a1d5720ce8>

have been used to supply troops stationed in Mali. Côte d'Ivoire is developing a partnership based on intelligence and anti-terrorist training, with training centers such as the one in Jacqueville. The idea of an integrated joint base combining American and French forces at Bouaké airport has been adopted.

Côte d'Ivoire's partners therefore adopted a rather discreet stance regarding the Ivorian electoral process. This was the case when Tidjane Thiam appealed to the UN to contest his removal from the electoral list. The Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) informed the United Nations Human Rights Committee that internal remedies – through Ivorian courts – had not guaranteed the civil and political rights of President Thiam.¹³⁸ This approach to the UN body was made possible by Côte d'Ivoire's 1997 ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Thiam sought reinstatement on the electoral list to be able to run as a candidate in the presidential election. In response, the Committee invited the Ivorian State to “ensure that Tidjane Thiam can exercise his political rights in accordance with Article 25 of the Covenant” without ruling on the immediate suspension of his removal.

Other partners of Côte d'Ivoire focused instead on providing technical and financial support for the electoral process. This was the case with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which contributed just over 217 million CFA francs to the presidential election (384,000 USD).¹³⁹ The funding was divided between the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) and the National Human Rights Council (CNDH). The support aimed to help conduct a peaceful, free, and transparent electoral process. Japan also followed this path by providing 612 million Yen (approximately 2.5 billion CFA francs) to Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁴⁰ This

non-reimbursable financial assistance from the Japanese government was intended to execute various projects under the supervision of the UNDP. For the CNDH, this primarily involved setting up an early warning system. The European Union, a traditional electoral partner of Côte d'Ivoire, did not deploy an official observation mission for the October 2025 presidential election. It limited itself to technical and diplomatic support by funding projects for social cohesion and the prevention of electoral violence. In May 2025, it announced it was ready to send observers “if conditions were met,” but no official confirmation of an EU mission was issued before or after the election.

Two major electoral observation missions monitored the presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire: the joint AU-ECOWAS mission and the CNDH-CI mission. The joint mission arrived in Abidjan in early October and remained on the ground to cover the campaign, voting, and counting, with a mandate to evaluate the entire electoral cycle and make recommendations. It was politically led by ECOWAS and African Union officials and supported by technical teams sent by both institutions. In its preliminary statement, the joint mission noted contextual factors that could affect the fairness of the election.¹⁴¹ The exclusion of certain major political figures from the candidate lists, calls for boycotts by opposition parties, and restrictions on access to the political field for some actors were highlighted. The report also highlighted the arrest of about 700 people in the run up to elections and allegations that the voters register was not credible as well as weak political dialogue, which contributed to heightened tensions and apprehension. These factors raised doubts about the equal treatment of competitors, even though voting day itself was largely peaceful. For ECOWAS and the African Union, the mission had the

138 <https://droit-et-politique-en-afrique.info/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Ordonnance-du-22-AVRIL-2025-du-President-du-Tribunal-de-premiere-instance-dAbidjan-radiation-de-la-liste-electorale-de-Tidjane-Thiam.pdf>

139 <https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-provides-financial-support-to-the-independent-electoral-commission-cei-and-the-national-human-rights-council-cndh-to-support-the-electoral-process-in-cote-divoire/>

140 https://www.ci.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_01759.html

141 <https://peaceau.org/uploads/preliminary-declaration-rci.pdf>

dual objective of ensuring independent observation and providing technical support for democratic stabilisation in a region where credible elections remain a key factor for peace. The finding of a peaceful vote is a positive signal for short-term stability. However, in their recommendations, both organisations raised concerns about political inclusion and low participation, showing that democratic consolidation will require sustained efforts. They urged Côte d'Ivoire to carry out institutional reforms and work toward calming the political climate.

For its part, the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) concluded that the election was generally conducted in a calm manner and in an environment conducive to the respect of human rights, thanks in particular to the prompt reporting of incidents by

observation missions. The organisation noted the responsiveness of the CEI and the Ministry of the Interior in managing incidents and preventing outbreaks. The process generally respected human rights, although distrust of institutions and tensions persisted. Regarding ongoing electoral issues, the CNDHCI once again highlighted problems accessing civil status documents (identity cards, nationality certificates), which hindered voter registration. Among its main recommendations, it encouraged candidates and the public to use only legal channels (courts) to contest results. It called on militants and supporters to refrain from any acts of violence during the electoral process. It also recommended improving the candidate selection process and ensuring an annual and effective update of electoral lists. These were two opposition demands essential for the resumption of political dialogue.

TOWARDS A RENEWAL OF THE IVORIAN POLITICAL CLASS

In a country where under-35s represent nearly 75% of the population¹⁴², the average age of political actors has remained well above 50 since the advent of multiparty politics in Côte d'Ivoire in the early 1990s.¹⁴³ This age group has dominated Ivorian political life since the death of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, remaining active for more than three decades.

The late Henri Konan Bédié (Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire), Alassane Ouattara (Rassemblement des Républicains), and Laurent Gbagbo (Ivorian Popular Front) engaged between 1995 and 2020 in sometimes bloody political battles, marked by shifting alliances and repeated calls for boycotts. These political conflicts over the years resulted in numerous deaths, arbitrary detentions, arrests, and significant destruction of public and private property.

The strong personalities of these leaders have hindered the emergence of younger cadres capable of taking over. Henri Konan Bédié led the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire until his death on August 1, 2023, at the age of 89. He had not ruled out running in the October 2025 presidential election, even as a young challenger, Jean Louis Billon, made his voice heard within the party. The former president's death triggered a leadership struggle at the top of the PDCI, pitting Tidjane Thiam, the successor designated by the party leadership, against Jean Louis Billon, a businessman who had already expressed ambitions to lead the party and run for president. Without a clearly organised handover between Henri Konan Bédié and the party's younger leaders, the PDCI was deeply divided approaching the October 2025 election. Tidjane Thiam and

Jean Louis Billon each represented, in their own way, hope for renewal at the helm of the historic party.

Laurent Gbagbo, for his part, did not adequately prepare the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) to survive or exist politically in his absence. When he was defeated and transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the party was left without genuine leadership. Most of its cadres were either in exile or in detention. The question of succession remained uncertain until Pascal Affi N'Guessan's release from prison. A loyalist of Laurent Gbagbo, he tried to remobilise the troops and rebuild a weakened FPI. However, the party's radical wing viewed his actions as an attempt to "bury Laurent Gbagbo"¹⁴⁴ politically.¹⁴⁵ The FPI weakened further and divided, so that Affi N'Guessan, a candidate against Alassane Ouattara in 2015, obtained only 9.29% of the vote. The split between Laurent Gbagbo and his former party was finalized when, upon his release, he created in 2021 the African Peoples Party – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI). Excluded from the October 2025 presidential election, Laurent Gbagbo announced in an interview his political retirement, leaving uncertainty about the role he could still play in the future, both within his party and on the national political scene.¹⁴⁶

142 https://www.anstat.ci/assets/publications/files/Chiffres_Cles_CIV_2025.pdf

143 <https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/120>

144 <https://www.infoivoire.net/master.php?mod=detpol&po=798>

145 <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20131119-cote-ivoire-fpi-demande-etats-generaux-affi-nguessan>

146 <https://mondafrique.com/decryptage/presidentielle-ivoirienne-laurent-gbagbo-ladieu-aux-armes/>

Ouattara, meanwhile, had attempted to withdraw from Ivorian political life after his second term. For a long time, he remained the only face associated with the life of the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR). He led his party from exile after being removed from the Ivorian political scene due to constitutional provisions regarding nationality and the concept of “Ivorité.” Upon his return to Côte d’Ivoire, he managed to impose political discipline within the RDR and led his party to the 2010 presidential election, the first he participated in since leaving the post of Houphouët-Boigny’s Prime Minister in December 1993. With the support of his former political rival, Henri Konan Bédié, he was elected President under the banner of RHDP, the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace.¹⁴⁷

After two terms, Ouattara designated Amadou Gon Coulibaly, one of his closest collaborators within the RDR, as his successor. However, Coulibaly’s sudden death on July 8, 2020, forced Ouattara to run again in the 2020 presidential election, largely boycotted by the opposition. Re-elected for a fourth term, the question of his departure and succession remains central. The Ivorian president indicated that there were “half a dozen” RHDP officials who could succeed him. Personalities such as Robert Beugré Mambé, Prime Minister; Adama Bictogo, Speaker of the National Assembly; Patrick Achi, Minister of State and Special Advisor to the President; and Téné Birahima Ouattara, Minister of State and Minister of Defense, are among possible successors.

The renewal of the Ivorian political class is not limited to the three traditional major parties—Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (conservative), Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (liberal), and African Peoples Party – Côte d’Ivoire (socialist).

Other political figures are emerging outside these formations. One of the most notable is Assalé Tiémoko Antoine. An investigative journalist and media owner, he entered politics by becoming the deputy mayor of Tiassalé, a constituency in southern Côte d’Ivoire.¹⁴⁸ A graduate in legal, administrative, and political sciences from the University of Cocody (Abidjan), his young and highly critical profile sets him apart from traditional political lineages. He became known to the public through the satirical investigative weekly he founded in 2011, *L’Eléphant Déchaîné*.¹⁴⁹ Through his investigations, he highlighted numerous cases of fraud, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, and abuse of power. His activism led to imprisonment in 2007 for denouncing acts of judicial corruption. After twelve months in prison, he founded the NGO SOS Justice Côte d’Ivoire, dedicated to defending human rights. Elected mayor of Tiassalé in 2018 and deputy in 2021¹⁵⁰, he implemented policies of transparency in municipal management and initiated reforms for good local governance. Assalé Tiémoko Antoine thus became the spokesperson for a segment of the Ivorian population demanding greater social justice, an end to autocratic abuses, and transparent state management. His progressive, inclusive, and innovative vision appeals to many young people, who joined his political movement launched in 2024: *Today and Tomorrow, Côte d’Ivoire (ADCI)*.

Another opposition leader embodies the desire for new political faces in Côte d’Ivoire: Vincent Toh Bi Irié, former Prefect of Abidjan. From 2002 to 2011, he worked as a UN consultant and as Resident Director of the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA). His expertise in governance and election observation led him to intervene in several African countries. A product of the National School of Administration (ENA), he has

147 <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1646732/politique/alassane-ouattara-se-dit-desireux-de-continuer-a-servir-la-cote-divoire/>

148 <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/campaigns/2017/05/assale/>

149 <https://www.adci-ci.org/actualites/details/tiemoko-antoine-assale-pour-lamour-de-la-justice-de-lintegrite-et-de-la-cote-divoire>

150 https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/04/21/tiemoko-assale-le-depute-qui-agite-le-parlement-ivoirien_6170538_3212.html

distinguished himself with an unprecedented style for a senior civil servant, positioning himself as an administrator attentive to citizens and engaging directly with them on social networks. Upon resigning as Prefect of Abidjan¹⁵¹ on August 26, 2020, two months before the disputed 2020 presidential election¹⁵², many Ivorians saw it as a sign of possible presidential ambitions. Encouraged by many internet users, he declined this hypothesis. At the end of 2020, he launched the citizen initiative *Aube Nouvelle*. On May 13, 2025, Vincent Toh Bi Irié officially announced his candidacy for the presidential election, presenting himself as “an alternative to traditional parties” such as the RHDP, PDCI, and PPA-CI. The rejection of his candidacy was not an end in itself but marked the entry into politics of a figure outside the established political networks.

Thus, the renewal of the Ivorian political class appears as a slow and progressive process since the advent of multiparty politics. The management of power has long been dominated by central figures arising from the succession crisis of the Houphouët-Boigny era. This struggle, embodied by three major leaders, has made it difficult for a new generation to rise, both within traditional major parties and outside them.

151 <https://fr.apanews.net/cote-divoire/vincent-toh-bi-ex-prefet-dabidjan-candidat-a-la-presidentielle/>

152 <https://news.abidjan.net/articles/678960/vincent-toh-bi-quitte-ses-fonctions-de-prefet-pour-lhonneur-et-le-respect-de-sa-conscience-declaration>

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT

- Initiate an inclusive and genuine national dialogue: The government should prioritise a constructive political dialogue with all opposition parties and civil society to address the failure of past reconciliation processes and the absence of consensus on electoral frameworks.
- Reform the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI): To restore public trust, the CEI must be restructured to ensure it is perceived as balanced and impartial, rather than biased toward the ruling party.
- Strengthen judicial independence: The authorities must end the perception of “victor’s justice” or “two-tier justice” by ensuring that the judiciary is not used as a political tool to disqualify opposition candidates or repress dissent.
- Review restrictive legislation: Laws that restrict freedom of expression and the right to protest, such as the 2024 Penal Code amendments and the Cybercrime Law, should be revised to align with constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms.
- Clarify constitutional term limits: To prevent future instability, a clear and explicit “lock” should be introduced in the Constitution to prohibit the accumulation of more than two terms, removing the ambiguity regarding “resetting the counters” during constitutional revisions.
- Release political prisoners: As a gesture of openness and reconciliation, the government should consider the release of individuals detained during electoral protests, as requested by the opposition and various human rights organisations.
- Ensure inclusive wealth distribution: While the country has seen strong macroeconomic growth, the government must address the unequal distribution of wealth, which remains a risk factor for political instability.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES (RULING AND OPPOSITION)

- Reject identity-based rhetoric: All political actors must refrain from using xenophobic or identity-based narratives, such as the concept of “Ivoirité” or derogatory ethnic markers, which have historically fueled regional and ethnic tensions.
- Commit to non-violence: Parties should disband their militants and urge supporters to refrain from violence and use only legal channels, such as the courts, to contest electoral results or administrative decisions.
- Enhance internal party democracy: To avoid fragmentation, parties like the PDCI and PPA-CI should establish clear, consensual mechanisms for leadership succession and candidate selection.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPPOSITION PARTIES

- Develop constructive alternatives: Beyond boycotting elections, the opposition should focus on building a unified front and proposing specific legislative reforms, such as improving the transparency of the candidate sponsorship verification process.
- Engage in continuous dialogue: The opposition should remain open to institutional dialogue rather than relying solely on civil disobedience, which has previously led to deadly clashes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Monitor human rights and digital freedoms:

Civil society organizations should continue to document and alert the government to abuses, while advocating for clearer legal definitions regarding “fake news” to prevent the disproportionate prosecution of bloggers and activists.

Expand voter education and early warning systems:

- Initiatives like the “CNDH RCI Early Alert” should be strengthened to detect and mitigate potential outbreaks of violence in real-time during sensitive political periods.
- Advocate for electoral list transparency: Civil society should push for an annual, effective, and audited update of the electoral register to ensure its credibility among all stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS (AU, ECOWAS, UN, EU)

- Maintain sustained diplomatic pressure: International partners should go beyond

technical support and actively encourage the Ivorian government to implement institutional reforms that promote political inclusion and democratic consolidation.

- Support social cohesion programs: Funding should be prioritised for projects that prevent electoral violence, combat disinformation, and foster dialogue between rival political communities.
- Provide technical assistance for audits: Regional bodies like ECOWAS should offer specialised technical teams to assist in independent audits of the electoral register and the candidate selection process to enhance trust in the results.
- Advocate for the protection of civic space: International observers must highlight and report on restrictions to the political field, including the arrest of protestors and the banning of public gatherings

CONCLUSION

The October 2025 presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire confirms that the country has not yet found mechanisms to conduct a fully peaceful, consensual, and non-violent electoral process. Successive political crises between 2011 and 2025 largely stem from the failure of national reconciliation processes and the absence of constructive political dialogue.

Various structural, political, and social factors have contributed to this situation. Following the post-electoral crisis of 2010–2011, Côte d'Ivoire established the Dialogue, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR) and the National Commission for Reconciliation and Victim Compensation (CONARIV). These bodies were often perceived as instrumentalised by the government, undermining their credibility. Their recommendations for fair justice and reparations for victims remained largely unimplemented. While investigation reports indicate that both conflict parties committed serious crimes, only opposition figures were prosecuted, such as Laurent Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé, transferred to the ICC in The Hague. This instrumentalisation of justice has contributed to the absence of political dialogue, a true source of lasting tension.

Since 2015, the opposition has demanded the restructuring of the CEI, considered biased, and an audit of the electoral register. The Electoral Code still contains conflicting articles, with no consensus between the government and opposition. According to observers, despite recorded violence, the 2025 presidential election marked a turning point by redefining the political landscape. It facilitated the entry of new actors representing an emerging generation of men and women who could contribute to the renewal of the ruling class. For this renewal to consolidate, national reconciliation must become a priority, accompanied by reforms promoting good governance and a calm political climate based on dialogue.

With the officialisation of Ouattara's fourth term, questions arose regarding Côte d'Ivoire's political future and constitutional interpretation. Three scenarios are envisioned: First, a prolonged stay in power, modeled on Cameroon or the Central African Republic, assuming the lifting of term limits in the Constitution, allowing the president to remain indefinitely. Second, a reform toward a parliamentary system, modeled on Togo, where the president would be elected by the National Assembly, with the candidate holding the parliamentary majority chosen by deputies. The third scenario is to respect the current Constitution, with Ouattara retiring after four terms, opening the way for a new political class and generational renewal.

Between 2025 and 2030, President Ouattara's governance will be closely scrutinised nationally and internationally. Socio-economic challenges remain significant in Côte d'Ivoire. In 2024, Côte d'Ivoire's public debt reached 59.2% of GDP, up 1.7 points from 2023. The IMF projects a ratio of 58.1% of GDP in 2025. In the first half of 2025, the state spent 861 billion CFA francs (about \$1.5 billion) servicing its debt. Politically, issues regarding the electoral register, CEI restructuring, and the release of political prisoners remain priorities.

The official report of election-related violence recorded 11 deaths, 71 injuries, and 1,658 arrests, according to the CNS on November 13, 2025.¹⁵³ Of 612 defendants tried for the events of October 11 in Abidjan, Gagnoa, Oumé, Daloa, and Dabou, 213 were acquitted, while five were sentenced to 36 months

153 <https://fr.apanews.net/cote-divoire/presidentielle-en-rci-11-morts-et-plus-de-1600-interpellations/>

suspended for “public order disturbances,” and 394 were sentenced to 36 months imprisonment for “public order disturbances” and associated offenses. The opposition continues to call for the release of detainees and the establishment of constructive political dialogue to ensure national stability and cohesion.



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