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Cote d'Ivoire (2006)

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

6

Civil Liberties:

6

Status:

Not Free

Population:

18,200,000

GNI/Capita:

\$660

Life Expectancy:

47

Religious Groups:

Christian (20-30 percent), Muslim (35-40 percent), indigenous beliefs (25-40 percent)

Ethnic Groups:

Akan (42.1 percent), Voltaiques, or Gur (17.6 percent), Northern Mandes (16.5 percent), Krous (11 percent), Southern Mandes (10 percent), other (2.8 percent)

Capital:

Yamoussoukro (official), Abidjan (de facto)

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

Deadlines for disarmament passed in 2005, and presidential and legislative elections scheduled for the end of the year were postponed for at least a year. Cote d'Ivoire remained split between a government-controlled south and rebel-controlled north. Ethnic tension remained rife, especially in the country's volatile west, although press freedom improved slightly.

Cote d'Ivoire gained independence from France in 1960, and President Felix Houphouet-Boigny ruled until his death in 1993. Henri Konan Bedie assumed power and won fraudulent elections in 1995 with 95 percent of the vote. Alassane Ouattara, the opposition's most formidable candidate, was barred from the contest, demonstrations were banned, and the media were intimidated.

General Robert Guei seized power in December 1999 and stood for election in October 2000. When initial results showed he was losing to Laurent Gbagbo, Guei sacked the electoral commission, detained its officers, and declared himself the winner. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in a popular uprising that toppled Guei from power. Clashes followed between supporters of Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), who claimed electoral victory, and Ouattara's Rally of Republicans (RDR), who called for new elections. Supported by security forces, Gbagbo refused to call for new polls. The political violence, in which hundreds of civilians died, led to a deepening division between the largely Muslim north and mainly Christian south, although the conflict was not strictly rooted in a north-south, Muslim-Christian divide. Gbagbo was eventually declared the winner of the election, with 59 percent, compared with 33 percent for Guei.

The FPI won 96 seats in the December 2000 legislative elections, while 4 went to the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire and 5 to the RDR. Twenty-four seats went to smaller parties and independents, and 2 seats in Ouattara's district went unfilled.

Civil war erupted in September 2002 when the government attempted to demobilize and retire some 700 soldiers. In what appeared to be either a coup attempt or a mutiny, Guei was killed. An insurgent group-the Patriotic Movement of Cote d'Ivoire, now part of the rebel New Forces-emerged in the north, calling for Gbagbo to step down and for new elections. The insurgents quickly seized control of more than half of the country. Fighting erupted in the

west, and African immigrants were targeted.

Gbagbo's government and the New Forces signed a ceasefire brokered by France in January 2003 that provided for a broad-based coalition government that would rule until elections were held. However, that accord broke down. Following the death of nine French peacekeepers in a government bombing campaign to crush the New Forces movement in November 2004, France destroyed the Ivorian air force, and- with the backing of the African Union (AU)- persuaded the UN Security Council to impose an arms embargo on the country. In February 2005, the Security Council tightened the embargo.

Some 4,000 French peacekeepers are monitoring the ceasefire line across the middle of the country, with some 6,000 more UN troops deployed as well. South African president Thabo Mbeki brokered a revised peace accord in April 2005, and presidential elections were set for October and legislative polls for December. However, disarmament failed to be implemented, no electoral commission was formed, and electoral registers were not updated. As a consequence, the AU extended Gbagbo's term in office by up to one year and called for a new prime minister. Elections for the National Assembly were postponed as well.

Some positive steps were made in 2005 toward loosening the political deadlock in Cote d'Ivoire. Gbagbo signed an executive order that would allow his main opponent, Ouattara, to run for president. The nationality law formerly said that presidential candidates had to have two Ivorian-born parents. In the past, Ivorian officials had barred Ouattara from standing as a candidate on the grounds that either one or both of his parents were born in Burkina Faso.

Cote d'Ivoire is the world's leading producer of cocoa, and the country was once a beacon of stability and economic progress in West Africa. However, the civil war has ravaged the economy. The country retains strong political, economic, and military backing from France, which has maintained a military garrison near Abidjan for years, mainly to protect French nationals who live in Cote d'Ivoire. Many French, however, fled after the war erupted.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Cote d'Ivoire cannot change their government democratically. The 1995 presidential election was neither free nor fair and was boycotted by all the major opposition parties. Voting in the October 2000 presidential election appeared to be carried out fairly, but only 5 of 19 potential candidates were allowed to contest the vote. The FPI of President Laurent Gbagbo won an overwhelming number of seats in the December 2000 legislative election.

The president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The president appoints the prime minister. The 225 members of a unicameral National Assembly are elected in single- and multi-district elections by direct popular vote to serve five-year terms. Major political parties include the ruling Ivorian Popular Front, the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire-African Democratic Rally, and the Rally of Republicans.

Corruption is a serious problem in Cote d'Ivoire. Profits from cocoa, cotton, and weapons, as well as informal taxes, have made resolving the Ivorian conflict a less attractive option for many in power—including members of the military and rebel forces. Cote d'Ivoire was ranked 152 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Press freedom is generally not respected in practice, although the state of press freedom improved somewhat in 2005 compared with 2004. State-owned newspapers and a state-run broadcasting system are usually unreservedly progovernment. Several private radio stations and a cable television service operate, but only the state broadcasting system reaches a national audience. In the north, the circulation of newspapers printed in Abidjan is heavily restricted, and local radio and television stations remain under the tight control of the rebel authorities. Several independent newspapers are published, many of which are linked to political parties. Despite the reconciliation process, most Ivorian media remain partisan and provocative. Some human rights groups have characterized some of the commentary as "incitement to violence."

Journalists in 2005 continued to face harassment and threats. In July, members of the progovernment Young Patriots militia disrupted distribution of several private newspapers and destroyed hundreds of copies. Reporters Without Borders has included the Young Patriots on its list of "press freedom predators." Armed, uniformed men in July 2005 stormed the Abidjan offices of state-run television and warned directors against broadcasting footage of opposition members. In December 2004, the National Assembly passed a new law removing criminal penalties for press offenses, such as defamation and publishing false information, and replacing them with stiff fines. The legislation also gives courts the option to suspend publications temporarily. There is liberal access to the internet.

Religious freedom is guaranteed but is not respected in practice. The government openly favors Christianity, and Muslims have been targeted as a result of the civil war. Many people who live in the rebel-occupied north adhere to Islam. Attacks on Muslims, however, have decreased in the past two years. Efforts by religious and civil society groups have helped ease tensions between Christians and Muslims.

The government, which owns most of the educational facilities in the country, inhibits academic freedom by requiring authorization for all political meetings held on college campuses. Security forces reportedly use students as informants at the University of Abidjan. The United Nations in July 2005 condemned the escalation of violence on university campuses in Cote d'Ivoire and cited "serious human rights violations." The United Nations said a pro-government student union, the Students Federation of Cote d'Ivoire, allegedly uses rape and torture to intimidate perceived government opponents and to maintain control on campus. The organization, which is linked to the ruling party, also controls who does business on campus and who lives in campus accommodation.

Human rights groups generally operate freely in Cote d'Ivoire, although rights

defenders sometimes receive death threats and are otherwise harassed. Union formation and membership are legally protected, although only a small percentage of the workforce is organized. Workers have the right to bargain collectively.

Cote d'Ivoire does not have an independent judiciary. Judges are political appointees without tenure and are highly susceptible to external interference. In many rural areas, traditional courts still prevail, especially in the handling of minor matters and family law. Security forces generally operate with impunity, and prison conditions are harsh. The United Nations has drawn up a list of suspected human rights violators in Cote d'Ivoire who could eventually face trial.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported that progovernment militias kill, torture, and harass civilians with impunity. Most of the militia members are from Gbagbo's Bete tribe in south-central Cote d'Ivoire. HRW said in a May 2005 report that government forces in the first three months of the year were training and equipping militia forces, including Liberian mercenaries, to renew the war against the New Forces. The report said the government was making increased use of the militia by targeting northerners, Muslims, and West African immigrants.

HRW has said that both the government and rebels were responsible for summary executions and for sexual violence against women and girls that were rooted in ethnic discrimination occurring in a climate of impunity. A UN report on human rights in 2005 cited a long list of extrajudicial killings and disappearances and instances of torture, beatings, and extortion by gunmen supporting both sides in the war.

Freedom of movement is curtailed throughout the country.

Human rights groups have accused officials of deliberately encouraging a culture of violent xenophobia in Cote d'Ivoire, whose economy has long attracted workers from neighboring countries. More than one-quarter of the country's population is estimated to be African expatriates. For decades, immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Guinea have provided cheap labor for local landowners, which helped turn Cote d'Ivoire into the world's leading cocoa producer. However, competition over land rights, economic decline, and the civil war have inflamed ethnic tensions, particularly in the western region. Clashes between indigenous groups and farm workers from other West African countries left at least 89 people dead within the first six months of 2005, according to HRW. There are major divisions within the military based on ethnic and political loyalties.

Child labor and child trafficking are problems, although Cote d'Ivoire has made efforts to stem both practices. Tens of thousands of West African children are believed to be working on Ivorian plantations in hazardous conditions. The government plans to set up dozens of field committees to stop farmers from using child laborers.

Women suffer widespread discrimination, despite official encouragement for respect for constitutional rights. Equal pay for equal work is offered in the small formal business sector, but women have few chances to obtain, or advance in, wage employment. In rural areas that rely on subsistence agriculture, education and job opportunities for women are even scarcer. Female genital mutilation is still practiced, although it has been a crime since 1998, and violence against women is reportedly common.