

Côte d'Ivoire



header1 Overview

Côte d'Ivoire continues to recover from an armed conflict that ended in 2011. Several root causes of that conflict remain, including ethnic and regional tensions, land disputes, corruption, and impunity. While an outbreak of violence during the 2020 electoral period represented a significant setback, civil liberties have been better protected in recent years, and civil society and the political opposition have operated more freely since that year's election.

header2 Key Developments in 2023

- The ruling Rally of the Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) party of President Alassane Ouattara won a resounding victory in largely peaceful municipal and regional elections in September. The opposition African People's Party-Côte d'Ivoire

(PPA-CI) of former president Laurent Gbagbo rejected the results, accusing the RHDP of fraud.

- In October, Ouattara dismissed Prime Minister Patrick Achi; later that month, he named Robert Beugré Mambé as his replacement.
- Henri Konan Bédié, who served as president from 1993 until 1999—when he was overthrown by a military coup—died in August; at the time of his death, he was the leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire–African Democratic Rally (PDCI-RDA).
- Pulchérie Gbalet, president of the Ivorian Citizens Alternative (ACI) civil society group, was conditionally released from prison in February after being detained in August 2022 on accusations of colluding with a foreign power; she had called on the Ivorian government to negotiate for the release of soldiers detained in Mali and visited that country before her arrest.

PR Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 1.00-4.00 pts 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

2.002

4.004

The October 2020 presidential election, in which President Ouattara won a third term, was neither free nor fair. RHDP presidential candidate and former prime minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly died unexpectedly that July. Ouattara, who had spent two five-year terms in office, reversed his previous decision not to run; he was nominated that August by the RHDP, which claimed Ouattara was eligible for two more terms because the 2016 constitution's two-term limit was adopted after Ouattara won his second term. Some critics charged that Ouattara had moved forward with the new constitution to enable his third term. His nomination was met by major protests from opposition parties.

The Constitutional Council validated the candidacy of only four individuals: Ouattara, Bédié, former prime minister Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and Bertin Konan Kouadio. Rejected candidates were unable to appeal, and the government ignored an African Court of Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) ruling to allow former prime minister Guillaume Soro and former president Gbagbo to run. Several leading opposition parties, including those of Soro and Gbagbo, refused to participate in the polls and called for boycotts and protests. The government banned public demonstrations throughout the election period, and those that occurred were met with violence. The campaign period itself was marred by instances of violence between progovernment and antigovernment supporters, resulting in dozens of deaths.

The opposition boycotted the election outright, while many would-be voters were prevented from casting ballots due to security concerns. Ouattara won 94 percent of the vote on a turnout of 54 percent, according to the government. These numbers were contested by independent observers from the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), which reported that only 54 percent of polling stations opened and only 41 percent of voter cards were distributed before the polls. The EISA also voiced concerns over the comprehensiveness of electoral-roll data: it noted that the roll included a large number of deceased individuals; claimed the election commission lacked transparency; and said the commission heavily favored the RHDP in administering the election.

The prime minister is the head of government, is appointed by the president, and is responsible for designating a cabinet which is also approved by the president. In October 2023, President Ouattara

dismissed Prime Minister Achi and dissolved his government. Later that month, the president named Mambé, the governor of the Abidjan district and former head of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), as the new prime minister.

A2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

2.002
4.004

The bicameral parliament consists of a 255-seat lower house, the National Assembly, and a 99-seat Senate, which was envisaged by the 2016 constitution and seated in 2018. National Assembly members are directly elected to five-year terms. Sixty-six senators are indirectly elected by the National Assembly and members of various local councils, while the president appoints the other 33; all 99 serve five-year terms.

A transparent, credible, and peaceful lower-house election was held in March 2021. Candidates from several opposition parties and coalitions, including most of those that had boycotted the October 2020 presidential elections, took part. However, the Soro-led Generations and People in Solidarity (GPS) party did not participate in either the presidential or the parliamentary elections. The RHDP won an absolute majority, taking 139 seats but suffering a net loss compared to its 167-seat contingent in the last parliament. An opposition coalition of Bédié's PDCI-RDA and the pro-Gbagbo Together for Democracy and Solidarity (EDS) won 80. Ten seats went to other party lists and groups, while 22 were won by independents. Despite the increased opposition participation and peaceful conduct of the polls, turnout remained low at 37.8 percent.

In the September 2023 municipal and regional elections, the RHDP won 123 of 201 municipalities and 25 of 31 regions, according to the CEI, while an alliance of the main opposition PDCI-RCA and PPA-CI parties claimed only 34 municipalities and 4 regions. The rest of the seats were claimed by independent candidates. The elections were described by local observers as peaceful and smooth compared with previous polls; however, the PPA-CI rejected the results, alleging irregularities and fraud by the CEI and the ruling party.

The RHDP won 56 of the indirectly elected Senate seats in elections held in September 2023.

A3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

2.002
4.004

The CEI includes members of civil society, though the government retains nominating powers and plays an outsized role in administration. The electoral roll is opaque and regionally unbalanced.

The electoral framework contains weaknesses, and dissatisfaction over recent reforms has persisted. Opposition groups have participated in the CEI's central commission after reforms allowed political parties with significant parliamentary representation to receive seats. Opposition candidates were also able to participate in the 2021 parliamentary elections without facing arbitrary rejection by electoral administration bodies.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

3.003
4.004

The Ivorian constitution permits multiparty competition. Recent presidential and legislative elections have been contested by a large number of parties and independent candidates. The ruling RHDP, dominated by Ouattara's Rally of the Republicans (RDR), holds a virtual lock on political power but has faced increased competition in recent years.

In contrast to the 2020 presidential elections—which had been boycotted by several leading opposition parties—competition improved in 2021, with multiple parties participating in that year's parliamentary elections. More parties have been formed since those polls, including by former president Gbagbo upon his return to Côte d'Ivoire after 10 years, following his acquittal by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of crimes against humanity.

The September 2023 municipal and regional elections saw a rise of the number of independent candidates.

B2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

2.002
4.004

Opposition parties have little chance of gaining power without reforming the electoral framework, which favors the ruling party. The RHDP has an absolute majority in the National Assembly, limiting the opposition's ability to pursue such reforms.

Opposition groups' chances to meaningfully contest the 2020 presidential election were dashed that August when the Constitutional Council rejected the candidacy of 40 of the 44 parties and individuals who submitted a nomination, including Soro and Laurent Gbagbo. International observer missions noted there was no appeals process for rejected candidates. The government ignored the ACHPR's ruling to accept Soro's and Gbagbo's candidacies. Opposition figures were arrested and detained by security forces after the 2020 election took place, while dissidents were arrested for participating in protests during that year's electoral period.

Political parties were largely able to campaign and hold rallies across the country during the September 2023 election period. In February 2023, 31 PPA-CI supporters were arrested during a protest in Abidjan in support of the party's secretary general, who had been summoned by a judge. In March, 26 of those activists were sentenced to two years in prison for disturbing public order; their sentences were later suspended on appeal.

B3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

2.002
4.004

Individuals faced intimidation, threats, and physical violence when participating in the 2020 presidential election. Those who held protests despite the government's ban faced forceful reprisals, with several demonstrators killed during the campaigning period. Members of leading civil society institutions, like academics, suggested that participating in public debate about the elections would be seen as protest by their superiors.

Supporters of the opposition faced threats from the police and the military, while militia members engaged in violence and enjoyed impunity. Party-linked militias refrained from such violence during the relatively peaceful and transparent March 2021 parliamentary elections, however.

B4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	2.002 4.004
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Citizenship has been a source of tension since the 1990s, when Ivorian nationalists adopted former president Bédié’s concept of “Ivoirité” to exclude perceived foreigners, including Ouattara, from the political process. A law relaxing some conditions for citizenship went into effect in 2014 but its application remains uneven. Hundreds of thousands of individuals, mostly northerners, lack documentation.

Women are poorly represented in the parliament, holding 13.4 percent of National Assembly seats and 24.7 percent of Senate seats as of December 2023.

A north-south, Muslim-Christian schism has been a salient feature of Ivorian life for decades and was exacerbated by the 2002–11 crisis. However, the schism has since receded, and the current governing coalition includes Muslims and Christians. Political parties are not ethnically homogenous—Côte d’Ivoire comprises people from more than 60 ethnicities—though each tends to be dominated by specific ethnic groups.

C Functioning of Government

C1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?	2.002 4.004
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Though defense and security forces are nominally under civilian control, problems of parallel command and control systems within the armed forces, known as the Republican Forces of Côte d’Ivoire, remain significant. In 2016, the government instituted a law meant to reduce the size of the officer corps and refine the military’s command structure, but these changes have largely gone unimplemented. Nonstate armed actors and former rebels enjoy significant influence, especially in the north and west.

Mutinies in 2017 exposed the fragility of the civilian government’s control over the military. Civilian control was tested again in 2019, when special forces members scuffled with Abidjan police in an effort to free an arrested colleague; this incident ended without violence.

Opposition parties openly participated in legislative processes in 2022 and 2023, an improvement over previous years. Opposition parliamentarians cast ballots when the National Assembly elected Adama Bictogo as its speaker in June 2022, for example.

C2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	1.001 4.004
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Corruption and bribery remain endemic, and particularly affect the judiciary, police, and government contracting operations. Petty bribery also hampers citizens’ access to services ranging from obtaining a birth certificate to clearing goods through customs. The High Authority for Good Governance (HABG), a public anticorruption body, is considered ineffective. Perpetrators at all levels seldom face prosecution.

C3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	1.001 4.004
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The government generally awards contracts in a nontransparent manner. Access to up-to-date information from government ministries is difficult for ordinary citizens to acquire, although some ministries do publish information online. Enforcement of a 2013 access to information law has been inconsistent. The HABG requires public officials to submit asset declarations, but this is not well enforced.

CL Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 2.002 4.004

Conditions for the press have improved since the end of the 2010–11 conflict. However, journalists face intimidation and occasional violence by security forces in connection with their work. Many journalists were arrested, detained, and beaten by police while covering protests and violence during and after the 2020 election period.

Most national media sources, especially newspapers, exhibit partisanship in their news coverage, consistently favoring either the government or the opposition. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) noted that RHDP supporters own the country’s three private television networks.

In April 2023, the National Press Authority (ANP), the country’s media regulator, suspended the daily newspaper *Le Temps*—which is reportedly close to Gbagbo’s PPA-CI—for six issues for allegedly harming the judiciary by publishing a photo of a judge in a March edition. The ANP also banned the paper’s publication director, Yacouba Gbané, from writing and publishing for three months.

Freedom of expression online and on social media is increasingly under threat. In December 2022, the Senate adopted two bills that increased regulation of false information online. The legislation was criticized for its potential to stifle freedom of speech online.

D2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? | 3.003 4.004

Legal guarantees of religious freedom are typically upheld, and individuals are free to practice their faith in public and private. Relations between Muslims and Christians worsened due to the 2002–11 crisis, but tensions have largely receded.

D3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? | 2.002 4.004

Public universities were closed and used as military bases during the 2010–11 conflict and now suffer from a lack of adequate resources and facilities.

Academics faced threats and intimidation if they addressed or critiqued the ruling party and other politically sensitive topics during the 2020 election cycle. Legal scholars were unable to organize a public debate on the constitutionality of President Ouattara’s third term, as many feared their

participation would be considered a form of illegal protest. Self-censorship persists at institutions led by RHDP supporters and for fear of repression by government agencies.

E1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

3.003

4.004

While people are free to engage in political discussion and debate, politics and the ruling party became dangerous topics during the 2020 election cycle. During and after the elections, militias and unknown actors attacked opposition supporters demonstrating and meeting during the opposition's boycott of the presidential election. Security forces largely overlooked the violence against opposition supporters, which discouraged individuals from openly expressing their political views. While Ivorians' ability to speak openly greatly improved after that election, self-censorship remains common and some political discussions still carry a risk of harassment for participants.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

2.002 4.004

Freedom of assembly was restricted via 2019 criminal code revisions, which include one- to three-year prison sentences for organizing "undeclared or prohibited" assemblies and a vague definition of "public order" that can be broadly interpreted by authorities.

President Ouattara banned public demonstrations and protests throughout the 2020 election period. Police violently dispersed protests and other acts of civil disobedience that stemmed from the opposition's election boycott; more than 50 people were killed because of violence at public demonstrations. Demonstrations that occurred in subsequent years were not subjected to such violence or interference.

E2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

2.002

4.004

Domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are generally free to operate. However, poor security conditions, especially in north and west, are a constraint for some organizations.

In February 2023, a judge granted a provisional release to Gbalet, the ACI president; she had been detained in August 2022 after visiting Mali and calling on the Ivorian government to negotiate for the release of Ivorian 49 soldiers held by that country's military junta. Prosecutors accused Gbalet of "agreeing with the agents of a foreign power" for her statements. The conditions of her release included the confiscation of her passport, reporting regularly to a police station, and not speaking publicly about the case.

E3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

3.003 4.004

The right to organize and join labor unions is constitutionally guaranteed. Workers have the right to bargain collectively. Strikes are common occurrences, though some have become violent. In

February 2023, three bakers' organizations in the country held a two-day strike to protest rising flour prices.

F Rule of Law

F1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

1.001 4.004

The judiciary is not independent, and judges are highly susceptible to external interference and bribes. Processes governing the assignment of cases to judges are opaque. The courts generally adjudicate cases in accordance with the ruling party's political interests; the judiciary was fully mobilized to support President Ouattara's third term and remains supportive of his policies.

F2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

1.001 4.004

The constitution guarantees equal access to justice and due process for all citizens, but these guarantees are poorly upheld in practice. The state struggles to provide attorneys to defendants who cannot afford legal counsel. Security officials are susceptible to bribery and are rarely held accountable for misconduct. Prolonged pretrial detention is a serious problem for both adults and minors, with some detainees spending years in prison without trial.

F3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

2.002
4.004

Physical violence against civilians in the form of extortion, banditry, and sexual violence—sometimes perpetrated by members of the armed forces—remain common. Disputes over land use and ownership between migrants and those who claim customary land rights sometimes turn violent. The country's prisons are severely overcrowded, and incarcerated adults and minors are not always separated.

Concerns about impunity, victor's justice, and reconciliation have persisted after the close of the 2010–11 conflict. To date, only a handful of individuals have been put on trial for crimes committed during that period, and most prosecutions have focused on figures associated with Gbagbo. In August 2022, President Ouattara pardoned the former president, who had faced a 20-year sentence related to the alleged theft of Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) assets during the 2010–11 conflict. Ouattara cited the need for "social cohesion" when announcing that offer. However, the CEI in June 2023 rejected Gbagbo's appeal to be reinstated to the electoral roll, meaning he was unable to participate in the September elections; he had been removed after his robbery conviction.

Terrorist attacks have occurred in the north of country, along the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali, in recent years. The Ivorian government has increased its security presence in the north and invested in social programs and infrastructure to address poverty and unemployment, leading to relative success in containing such attacks compared with its neighbors.

F4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2.002
4.004

Same-sex relations are not criminalized in Côte d'Ivoire, but LGBT+ people can face prosecution under criminal code language amended in 2019 that references “unnatural acts” and “moral sensitivity.” No law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. LGBT+ people face societal prejudice as well as harassment by state security forces.

Intercommunal tensions over land rights frequently involve migrants from neighboring countries, who sometimes experience violent intimidation.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

2.002

4.004

Freedom of movement has improved since 2011. However, irregular checkpoints and acts of extortion continue in some areas, particularly in the west and north, and near gold- and diamond-producing regions. The government’s efforts to combat these practices have been undermined by inconsistent financial support and a failure to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. Women are generally afforded equal freedom of movement, though risks of insecurity and sexual violence hinder this in practice.

G2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2.002

4.004

Citizens have the right to own and establish private businesses, and the country has attracted significant investment since 2011. However, property and land rights remain weak, especially in the west, where conflict over land tenure remains a significant source of tension. Under a marriage law passed in 2019, women are legally entitled to use inherited property as collateral for loans.

Migrants may be discriminated over land issues even though they have legal documents of their property title.

G3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

1.001

4.004

Women suffer significant legal and economic discrimination, and sexual and gender-based violence are widespread. According to a 2019 survey carried out by Citizens for the Promotion and Defense of the Rights of Children, Women and Minorities (CPDEFM), an Ivorian NGO, more than 70 percent of women in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire’s largest city, have been victims of domestic violence.

Legal protections from gender-based violence are weak and are often ignored. Impunity for perpetrators also remains a problem, and when it is prosecuted, rape is routinely reclassified as indecent assault. Costly medical certificates are often essential for convictions yet are beyond the means of victims who are impoverished.

Child marriage is historically widespread, though the 2019 marriage law set the minimum age for marriage at 18 for both sexes. Customary and religious marriages, more common outside urban areas, were not affected by the law. The law also banned same-sex marriage.

G4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2.002

4.004

Despite efforts by the government and international industries in recent years to counter the phenomenon, child labor is a frequent problem, particularly in the cocoa industry. Human trafficking is prohibited by the constitution, but government programs for victims of trafficking—often children—are inadequate.

In the 2023 edition of its *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the US State Department found that the government was increasing its efforts to combat trafficking—including successfully convicting more traffickers and identifying more victims—but also reported that victims receive insufficient shelter or services.

In November 2023, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice ordered the government of Côte d'Ivoire to pay 50 million CFA francs (\$83,728) to villagers in Similimi after finding that the state had failed to protect them from the harmful effects of mining activities in the area. The case had been brought by the villagers in 2020 after years of destructive mineral extraction by an Indian-owned company near Similimi.