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Freedom Status: Partly Free

Aggregate Score: 51 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 4.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 4 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 4 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 23,900,000

Capital: Yamoussoukro

GDP/capita: \$1,434

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Côte d'Ivoire continues to recover from political turmoil and widespread conflict that ended in 2011. While the UN peacekeeping mission withdrew in 2017, the country has experienced unrest and instability within the armed forces, and growing political tensions within the ruling coalition. Several root causes of the country's violent conflict remain, including ethnic and regional tensions, land disputes, corruption, and impunity.

Key Developments in 2017:

- The UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) reached the end of its mandate, and withdrew its peacekeeping mission in June.
- In January and May, mutinous soldiers in the national army – many of them former rebels who helped bring President Alassane Ouattara to power in 2011 – demanded the payment of bonuses from the government. While the situation ended peacefully when the government paid the bonuses, the events threatened to destabilize the country, and raised fears of a potential coup d'état.
- In October, Souleymane Koné, a top aide to National Assembly speaker Guillaume Soro, was arrested following revelations that mutinous soldiers had been given access to arms

cachees at a property owned by Koné. The arrest was seen as part of a widening split between the pro-Ouattara and pro-Soro factions of the current governing coalition.

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) continued its trial of former president Laurent Gbagbo for alleged war crimes.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40 (-1)

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 7 / 12

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 3 / 4

Ouattara won the 2015 presidential election in the first round. Despite tensions and some government crackdowns on opposition rallies in the lead-up, the election itself was deemed credible by international and domestic observers, and was the first peaceful presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire in more than two decades.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 2 / 4

National and local legislative elections have improved since violent conflict ended in 2011. The members of the current National Assembly were directly elected in credible, largely peaceful polls held in December 2016. The ruling Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) coalition won a solid majority, taking 167 of 255 seats. Independent candidates took the majority of remaining seats. The 2016 constitution envisages the creation of a second house of parliament, a Senate, but at the end of 2017 the institution was not yet functional.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 2 / 4

Côte d'Ivoire's new constitution was approved in an October 2016 referendum and promulgated that November. The constitutional referendum was marred by low turnout (about 42 percent), and violence at some polling stations, and was boycotted by the opposition.

In November 2016, the African Court on Human and People's Rights ruled that Côte d'Ivoire's Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) is imbalanced in favor of the government, undermining independence and impartiality, and ordered that the electoral law be amended. At the end of 2017, legislators had not addressed the ruling.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 8 / 16

B1. 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? 2 / 4

The constitution of Côte d'Ivoire permits multiparty competition, and recent presidential and legislative elections have been contested by a large number of parties and independent candidates. However, the ruling RHDP coalition holds a virtual lock on national political power.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 2 / 4

Former president Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) holds seats in parliament but remains relatively weak and disorganized, with members split between two main factions. The first is hardliners who insist on boycotting elections until Gbagbo's release from the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC), where he faces charges of crimes against humanity; the second is comprised of moderates who support Pascal Affi N'Guessan, who served as prime minister during Gbagbo's presidency. Since 2015, the FPI has been bolstered somewhat by the release of political prisoners, the unfreezing of several FPI partisans' bank accounts, and the return of some FPI members from exile.

Several prominent opposition figures were detained by security forces during the lead-up to the 2016 constitutional referendum.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 2 / 4

Recent elections have been generally free from extensive voter intimidation or harassment. However, leaders within the military, especially former rebel commanders, are viewed as having significant political influence in the country.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 2 / 4

Citizenship has been a source of tension since the 1990s, when Ivorian nationalists adopted former president Henri Bédié's concept of "Ivoirité" to exclude perceived foreigners (including Ouattara) from the political process. A new nationality law relaxing some conditions for citizenship went into effect in 2014. However, its application remains challenging, and hundreds of thousands of individuals, mostly northerners, lack documentation.

The 2016 constitution abolished a rule that had required both of the president's parents to be Ivorian, instead mandating that only one parent be Ivorian.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 4 / 12 (-1)

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 2 / 4 (-1)

Despite several years of relative calm, military mutinies in January and May 2017 exposed the fragility of the civilian government's control over the state armed forces. To quell the crisis – which renewed fears of a potential coup d'état – the government was forced to pay out bonuses to the mutineers, many of whom were former rebels who had backed Ouattara.

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 (FRCI), remain a significant challenge. Former rebel commanders of a particular faction, the Forces Nouvelles, dominate the military leadership.

Separately, the UNOCI reached the end of its mandate in 2017, and withdrew its peacekeeping mission in June.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 due to military mutinies against the government that threatened to destabilize the country.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Corruption and bribery remain endemic, and particularly affect the judiciary, police, and government contracting operations. Perpetrators seldom face prosecution. Significant quantities of cacao, gold, and diamond resources are sold on illicit black markets rather than officially approved channels, with authorities frequently turning a blind eye to the issue.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

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. In 2013, the National Assembly passed an access to information law, but enforcement has been inconsistent.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 32 / 60**D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 11 / 16****D1. Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4**

Conditions for the press have improved since the end of the 2010-11 conflict, and incidents of violence and intimidation against journalists are relatively rare. However, most national media sources, especially newspapers, exhibit partisanship in their news coverage, consistently favoring either the government or the opposition. In May 2017, a new media law was introduced that would have mandated heavy fines and as many as five years in prison for certain violations. However, it was withdrawn after media freedom advocates voiced strong objections.

D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 3 / 4

Legal guarantees of religious freedom are typically upheld. A north-south, Christian-Muslim 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 coalition government includes Muslims and Christians.

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

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. However, academic freedom is usually upheld. In 2017, there were demonstrations by the powerful university-student union, the Fédération Estudiantine et Scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI), against a rise in tuition fees. Several of the demonstrations ended in violent clashes between demonstrators and police. There were also reports of classes being disrupted or canceled during strike actions that took place during the year.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 3 / 4

People are generally free to engage in political discussion and debate without fear of harassment or detention. However, the legacy of violent conflict can chill public debate of sensitive topics.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 8 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 2 / 4

The constitution protects the right to free assembly, but in practice the government has attempted to restrict or forcibly disperse peaceable gatherings, and sometimes violence between demonstrators and police has erupted. In May 2017, several people were hurt when mutinous soldiers fired upon demonstrators protesting the mutiny. Police also arrested and employed disproportionate force against demonstrating university students during the year. Yet despite risks and restrictions, public protests and demonstrations are common.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 3 / 4

Security conditions and freedom of movement for both domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were threatened in 2017 by military uprisings and fears of instability. However, most organizations continued to operate freely.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

The right to organize and join labor unions is constitutionally guaranteed. Workers have the right to bargain collectively. Côte d'Ivoire typically has various professional strikes every year, though sometimes strikes have become violent. In 2017, teachers' unions and civil servants organized several strikes at which they called for better wages and back pay they claimed was owed.

F. RULE OF LAW: 6 / 16**F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4**

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 ICC continued its trial of former president Gbagbo in 2017 on charges of crimes against humanity committed during the 2010-11 crisis, and in September, ruled that he would remain in ICC custody. The ICC has said it is investigating pro-Ouattara actors for crimes committed by former rebels, but it has filed charges only against pro-Gbagbo defendants so far.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

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

Concerns about impunity, victor's justice, and reconciliation have persisted after the close of the 2010-11 crisis. To date, only a handful of individuals have been put on trial for crimes committed during that period. In 2017, some Gbagbo supporters awaiting trial for crimes allegedly committed during the crisis were provisionally released, though many others remained in custody as they awaited their trials.

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 2 / 4

Overall levels of violence in the country are lower than during the height of the political-military crisis in 2010-11. However, physical violence against civilians in the form of extortion, banditry,

and sexual violence, sometime perpetrated by members of the state armed forces, remain common. In many areas of the country, and particularly in the west, disputes over land use and ownership between migrants, and those who claim customary land rights, sometimes turn violent. In October 2017, intercommunal clashes near the Goin-Débé forest reserve resulted in 2 deaths and 8 injuries.

Protests and demonstrations by soldiers at military barracks around the country in 2017, along with raids and attacks against police and gendarmerie posts by unidentified soldiers, renewed fears of instability. In October, Souleymane Koné, a top aide to Guillaume Soro – the former head of the Forces Nouvelles rebel group and current National Assembly speaker – was arrested by state authorities in Abidjan after it was revealed that mutinous soldiers had been given access to arms caches at a property in Bouaké owned by Koné. The arrest was part of a widening split between the pro-Ouattara and pro-Soro factions of the current governing coalition.

The country's prisons are severely overcrowded, and incarcerated adults and minors are not always separated.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4

Same-sex sexual conduct is not specifically criminalized in Côte d'Ivoire, but LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people can face prosecution under measures criminalizing acts of "public indecency." No law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. LGBT people face societal prejudice as well as violence and 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: 7 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 2 / 4

Freedom of movement has improved since the end of the civil war in 2011, with fewer illegal roadblocks along major roads and within Abidjan. However, irregular checkpoints and acts of extortion remain a problem in some areas of the country, 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.

G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 2 / 4

Citizens have the right to own and establish private businesses, and private industry grown since the end of the crisis in 2011. The country has also attracted significant investment. However, property and land rights remain weak and poorly regulated, especially in the west, where conflict over land tenure between migrants and those who claim customary land rights remains a significant source of tension.

G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 1 / 4

Women suffer significant legal and economic discrimination, and sexual and gender-based violence are widespread. However, impunity for perpetrators 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.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4

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

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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