

Côte d'Ivoire

PARTLY FREE

49
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	19 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	30 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS**49 /100 Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



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.

Key Developments in 2022

- In July, authorities in Mali arrested 49 Ivorian soldiers who arrived to participate in a UN peacekeeping mission there. Forty-six of them received prison sentences for undermining Malian security in December, while three who had been released in September received death sentences in absentia.
- In August, Ivorian authorities placed Pulchérie Gbalet, president of the Ivorian Citizens Alternative (ACI) civil society group, in pretrial detention and accused her of colluding with a foreign power. Gbalet had called on the Ivorian government to negotiate for the release of the soldiers detained in Mali and visited that country before her arrest; she remained in custody in Côte d'Ivoire at year's end.
- Also in August, President Alassane Ouattara offered a pardon to former president Laurent Gbagbo, who faced a prison sentence over allegations that he stole assets from the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) during the 2010–11 conflict.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

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

2 / 4

The October 2020 presidential election, in which President Alassane Ouattara won a third term, was neither free nor fair. Rally of the Houphouëtists for Democracy and

Peace (RHDP) presidential candidate and former prime minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly died unexpectedly that July. President 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, Henri Konan Bédié, 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 Laurent 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, noting 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. Patrick Achi was appointed in 2021 following the death of former prime minister Hamed Bakayoko. Achi and his cabinet resigned in April 2022; Achi was reappointed that month to preside over a smaller group of ministers.

A2 0-4 pts

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

2/4

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. Some 66 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 the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire–African Democratic Rally (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.

A3 0-4 pts

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

2/4

In 2016, the ACHPR ruled that the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) was biased in favor of the government and ordered amendments to the electoral law. President Ouattara conceded to the CEI's reorganization, increasing the number of civil society members in the CEI from four to six by parliamentary amendment in 2019. Civil society criticized the reforms, warning that the government would still exert influence due to its continued nominating powers, and changes that could make the body more independent were only partially implemented. Ruling party members were largely left

to run the CEI due to staff changes, allegations of irregularities in appointment and other procedures, and opposition boycotts that affected district-level staffing.

In April 2020, the government amended the electoral code by emergency executive ordinance—enabled via COVID-19 emergency measures—without consulting candidates. The updated electoral roll was opaque and regionally unbalanced; the CEI refused to report detailed data or submit to an independent audit. That July, the ACHPR ruled that Côte d'Ivoire must take steps to further reform the CEI, including the nominating process, to reduce potential government influence over nominations.

The post-2016 changes have improved electoral competition, though the Ivorian electoral framework still contains weaknesses and dissatisfaction over recent reforms has persisted. Opposition groups have more recently 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 0-4 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?

3/4

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 2018, the PDCI of former president Bédié broke away from a coalition with the RHDP. Guillaume Soro, meanwhile, formed the GPS after being pressured into resigning as National Assembly speaker in 2019.

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. In June 2021, former president Laurent Gbagbo returned to Côte d’Ivoire after 10 years, following his acquittal by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of crimes against humanity; he launched the African People’s Party–Côte d’Ivoire, a left-wing pan-African party, that October. The Ivorian Popular Front, which he founded in exile in 1982, remains active. Former first lady Simone Ehivet Gbagbo formed the Movement of Capable Generations (MGC) in 2021 and was named party leader in August 2022.

B2 0-4 pts

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

2 / 4

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.

B3 0-4 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 / 4

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 being 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 0-4 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 / 4

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 13.7 percent of National Assembly seats and 21.4 percent of the Senate as of December 2022.

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 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

2 / 4

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, an improvement over previous years. Opposition parliamentarians cast ballots when the National Assembly elected Adama Bictogo as its speaker in June, for example.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	1 / 4
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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 0-4 pts

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

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

2/4

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. 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.

While serious violence against journalists was rare after the end of the 2010–11 conflict, many journalists were arrested, detained, and beaten by police while covering protests and violence during and after the 2020 election period.

D2 0-4 pts

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, 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 0-4 pts

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

2/4

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.

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.

D4 0-4 pts

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

3/4

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 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

2/4

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 0-4 pts

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

2 / 4

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.

Pulchérie Gbalet of the ACI was placed in pretrial detention in August 2022; Gbalet had called on the Ivorian government to negotiate for the release of 49 soldiers held in Mali and had visited that country. Prosecutors accused Gbalet of “agreeing with the agents of a foreign power” for her statements. Gbalet remained in custody in Côte d’Ivoire at year’s end.

E3 0-4 pts

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. Strikes are common occurrences, though some have become violent.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	1 / 4
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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 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	1 / 4
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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. In 2018, the lower house adopted a new Code of Criminal Procedure that included a circuit of criminal courts to address the backlog.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	2 / 4
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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 2018, Ouattara pardoned 800 people accused or convicted of committing violent acts during the 2010–11 conflict, including former first lady Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, ostensibly to foster reconciliation. In 2019, Laurent Gbagbo was acquitted of crimes against humanity during the 2010–11 conflict by the ICC and was conditionally released; he returned to Côte d'Ivoire in 2021 after the acquittal was upheld. In August 2022, President Ouattara offered a pardon to Laurent Gbagbo, who faced a 20-year sentence related to the alleged robbery of BCEAO assets during the 2010–11 conflict. Ouattara cited the need for “social cohesion” when announcing that offer.

Terrorist attacks have occurred in the north of country, along the borders with Burkina Faso and Mali, in recent years. In 2021, the head of the General Directorate for External Security (DGSE), a French intelligence agency, warned that terrorist groups were planning to expand their operations in Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivorian government increased its budget for antiterrorism programs in the north that December.

Côte d'Ivoire has participated in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); in July 2022, Malian authorities arrested 49 Ivorian soldiers who Abidjan said were sent to take part in MINUSMA. Forty-six of them received prison sentences for undermining Malian security in December, while three who had been released in September received death sentences in absentia. In November, the Ivorian government announced it would end its participation in the peacekeeping mission by August 2023.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?	2 / 4
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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 0-4 pts

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 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 0-4 pts

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

2/4

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 0-4 pts

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

1/4

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 0-4 pts

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

2/4

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 2022 edition of its *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the US State Department reported that the government was successfully convicting more traffickers and identifying more victims, but also reported that victims receive insufficient shelter or services.



On Côte d'Ivoire

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

49/100 **Partly Free**

Other Years

2022

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