Overview:

Côte d’Ivoire continues to recover from an armed conflict that ended in 2011. While security concerns and interference by security forces can constrain freedoms of expression and association, these are generally upheld; freedom of movement has improved, and the economy has seen steady growth. However, unrest within the armed forces and growing tensions within the ruling coalition threaten stability, and several root causes of the country’s violent conflict remain, including ethnic and regional tensions, land disputes, corruption, and impunity. Women are significantly underrepresented in politics.

Key Developments:

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2018:

- A split between the two main parties in the ruling Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) coalition—president Alassane Ouattara’s Rally of the Republicans (RDR) and former president Henri Konan Bédié’s Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI)—preceded October’s municipal elections.

- After municipal election results showed a robust performance by the RHDP, PDCI supporters staged protests and accused the government of electoral fraud. Some protests erupted into violence, resulting in the deaths of at least three people.

- Elections to the country’s new Senate were held in March 2018, but the body was not fully functional at year’s end due to a lack of resources and unresolved political disputes.
during the 2010–11 crisis, including former first lady Simone Gbagbo. She remained wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

- The ICC case against former president Laurent Gbagbo, who faces charges of crimes against humanity, was ongoing at year’s end.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40

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

The president is directly elected to a five-year term, and will be subject to a two-term limit after the 2020 election. 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. Ouattara, who is currently serving his second term, has claimed that the 2016 constitution permits him to run for a third in 2020.

The prime minister is head of government, and is appointed by the president and responsible for designating a cabinet, which is also approved by the president. Amadou Gon Coulibaly was appointed prime minister in early 2017, after the victory of the RHDP in the December 2016 legislative elections.

RHDP candidates posted the strongest performance in October 2018 mayoral elections, held concurrently with elections to local councils. PDCI supporters staged protests and accused the government of electoral fraud after the announcement of election results; some protests erupted into violence, resulting in deaths of at least three people.
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 March 2018. National Assembly members are directly elected to five-year terms. Of the Senate’s 99 seats, 66 are indirectly elected by the National Assembly and members of various local councils, and 33 members are appointed by the president; all members serve five-year terms.

The members of the current National Assembly were directly elected in credible, largely peaceful polls held in December 2016. The ruling RHDP won a solid majority, taking 167 of 255 seats. Independent candidates took the majority of remaining seats. In the March 2018 Senate elections, RHDP candidates won 50 of the 66 elected seats, and independent candidates took the remaining 16; the opposition boycotted the vote over allegations of bias by the Côte d’Ivoire’s Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), as well as over claims that the body’s establishment would help Ouattara consolidate power. (The opposition had also boycotted the referendum on the draft constitution that established the new body.)

While the new Senate members were seated, the new legislative body has yet to become fully functional, due mainly to a lack of funding and unresolved disputes among political factions.

RHDP candidates posted strong results in the October 2018 elections to regional councils, held concurrently with mayoral elections. The postelection environment saw allegations of fraud against the RHDP by members of the PDCI, and was marred by some instances of violence.

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

In 2016, the African Court on Human and People’s Rights ruled that the CEI is imbalanced in favor of the government, undermining independence and impartiality, and ordered that the electoral law be amended. In August 2018, President Ouattara conceded to the reorganization of the CEI, but these
Some of the violence that followed the October 2018 municipal elections arose from disputes that came in the wake of delayed results. Activists affiliated with the PDCI who staged protests after the elections accused the CEI of fraud and progovernment bias.

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. In recent years, the ruling RHDP coalition—dominated by Ouattara’s RDR and former President Henri Konan Bédié’s PDCI—has held a virtual lock on national political power. However, after months of growing tensions between President Ouattara and Bédié over the question of who the RHDP’s nominee should be for the 2020 presidential election, a significant faction of PDCI candidates defected and ran against the RHDP in the October 2018 municipal elections.

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

Former president Laurent 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 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.

While the RHDP posted the strongest performance in the 2018 municipal elections, the PDCI won control of a handful of key municipalities, including
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.

Tensions ahead of the 2018 municipal polls contributes to some unease among voters, with the split between the RHDP and PDCI prompting some concern that the polls could be accompanied by violence. Roughly 30,000 police, gendarmes, and soldiers were deployed across the country to maintain security for the vote. Separately, there were some reports of candidates handing out cash to voters.

B4. 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 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, and hundreds of thousands of individuals, mostly northerners, lack documentation.

Women are poorly represented in in the parliament, holding just 11 percent of seats in the National Assembly and 12 percent in the Senate. A 2017 cabinet reshuffle left 6 women in a 28-member cabinet.

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 coalition government includes Muslims and Christians.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 4 / 12
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. Additionally, after several years of relative calm, military mutinies in 2017 exposed the fragility of the civilian government's control over the state armed forces.

Especially in northern and western areas of the country, non-state armed actors and former rebels enjoy significant influence relative to elected representatives.

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. Petty bribery also hampers citizens’ access to quotidian services ranging from obtaining a birth certificate to clearing goods through customs. Perpetrators at all levels seldom face prosecution.

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. The High Authority for Good Governance, an anticorruption body, requires public officials to submit asset declarations, but this is not well enforced.

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,
connection with their work. In March 2018, a blogger was assaulted by police while attempting to cover an opposition protest, and was not permitted to file a formal complaint about the incident.

Most national media sources, especially newspapers, exhibit partisanship in their news coverage, consistently favoring either the government or the opposition.

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. Relations between Muslims and Christians were exacerbated by the 2002–11 crisis, but tensions have since receded. In 2016, local authorities closed a mosque in Man in order to resolve leadership dispute that had prompted violent incidents.

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 2018, labor strikes by university employees claiming back wages disrupted classes for thousands of students, but took place peacefully and without interference.

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 some 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
Despite risks and restrictions, public protests and demonstrations are common. In 2018, protests by PDCI activists after the October municipal elections turned violent in a number of areas, resulting in property destruction and at least three deaths.

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

Domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are generally free to operate. However, poor security conditions—especially in northern and western areas of the country—are a constraint for some organizations.

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 2018, teachers, university professors, police, and civil servants all organized labor strikes in demand of back pay from the government, with some such actions apparently inspired by the military mutinies the previous year.

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.

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
Security officials are susceptible to bribery and are rarely held accountable for misconduct.

**F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurrections? 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.

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 crisis. 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 an August 2018 move he said was meant to foster reconciliation, Ouattara pardoned some 800 people accused or convicted of committing acts of violence during the 2010–11 crisis, including former first lady Simone Gbagbo, who remains wanted by the ICC. A number of those released had been held without trial for extended periods.

Meanwhile, the ICC continued its trial of former president Gbagbo in 2018 on charges of crimes against humanity committed during the 2010–11 crisis. 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.

**F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4**
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 continue 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. Women are generally afforded equal freedom of movement, though risks of insecurity and sexual violence hinder this in practice.

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 has 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
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 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 new constitution, but government programs for victims of trafficking—often children—are inadequate.