

Côte d'Ivoire Overview

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Environment

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is located in West Africa, on the Gulf of Guinea, which forms its southern frontier. It is bordered by [Ghana](#) to the east, [Burkina Faso](#) to the north-east, [Mali](#) to the north-west, and [Guinea](#) and [Liberia](#) to the west. The south is densely forested, giving way to savanna plains in the north. The only notable hills are in the north-west. The country is noted for its agricultural production, especially of cacao and coffee.

Peoples

Main languages: French (official), Dioula, Baoulé.

Main religions: Christianity and syncretic Christianity (35-40%), Islam or syncretic Islam (35%), traditional beliefs (25-30%).

Main minority groups: [Voltaic](#), including Senoufo and Lobi, 3.2 million (17.6%); Northern Mandé ([Manding](#)) 3 million (16.5%), [Krou](#) (Kru), including Bété, Dida and Guéré (Wè), 2 million (11%); Southern Mandé 1.8 million (10%), Non-Ivoiran Africans 5 million (28%), Dan 800,000 (4.4%), Guro 332,000 (1.8%), Lebanese 60,000 (0.3%), Gagu 37,000 (0.2%), French 10,000 (0.06%).

[Note: Figures for religion come from US CIRF, 2007. Most data on most ethnic groups comes from the CIA World Factbook, 2007. Exceptions are the figures for Baoulé, foreigners, Lebanese and French, which come from the US State Department, 2007; the figures for Dan, Guro, Gagu, Lobi, Bete, Dida, Guere and Agni come from Ethnologue, 1993. Numbers are converted to percentages and vice-versa using the CIA's 2007 estimated total population of 18 million.]

The country has over sixty ethnic groups, whose linguistic and cultural identities and interrelationships are diverse and complex. The five main cultural clusters are: the dominant Akan-speakers, who make up 42 per cent of the population, mainly in the center, east and south-east; Northern Manding (Mandé), mainly in the north-west; Voltaic peoples, including Senoufo in the north and Lobi in the central region; Krou in the south-west; and Southern Manding (Mandé) in the west.

The Baoulé, an Akan subgroup, are the largest single ethnic group, comprising about 15-20 per cent of

the total population.

Another Akan subgroup is the Ebrié (Kyama), an extremely complex grouping of people along the south-east coast, particularly around the Ebrié Lagoon and Abidjan. Numbering about 76,000, they have largely shifted from traditional occupations to cash crop farming. Lagoon people have attracted many migrant labourers to their farms, especially Mossi from Burkina Faso. Baoulé and Dioula have also moved in and assumed political and economic prominence to the concern of the original inhabitants. Ebrié originally came further inland around 1750. Ebrié never organized into central states; their most inclusive political unit has been the village. Age grades are an important part of social cohesion. Ebrié occupy the area around Abidjan, Bingerville and Dabou and were the indigenous people of the site of the city of Abidjan. Although numerically overwhelmed by immigrants, they have managed to preserve their identity and some aspects of traditional culture which was oriented towards the waters of the sea and the lagoons. They are however becoming increasingly attracted to Christianity and integrated into the wider economy and society.

Around 610,000 Agni live in the far south-east of Côte d'Ivoire. They are part of the Akan group and related to another Akan sub-group, the Nzima who also live in Ghana. The Agni developed a small semi-autonomous society called Sanwi that was grouped under a paramount chief. The Sanwi polity evolved into the Sanwi kingdom which evoked strong loyalties and ethnic pride. The continuing importance of the kingdom was demonstrated in 1959 and 1969, when Sanwi attempted to secede from Côte d'Ivoire in the hope of demonstrating Agni autonomy from Baoulé domination.

Dan (Yacouba) are an ethnic group classified as peripheral Mandé, sharing the cultural patterns but not the language of the Krou. Dan live in the extreme west of Côte d'Ivoire and into Liberia. Self-awareness as a distinct culture emerged only as recently as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dan were pushed into their present mountainous and forest location by Manding expansion. At a high altitude they cultivate rice and trade kola nuts for dried fish from the Niger River through Dioula traders. Dan resisted Islam even though living on its southern frontier. Armed resistance against colonial rule was put down in 1905-1908. Young men traditionally migrate to the coast to work on ships and in ports.

Gagu people of south-central Côte d'Ivoire are thought to be the oldest residents of the country. Gagu practise hunting and gathering as a supplement to agriculture and use bark as a material for clothing and bedding. They assimilated into Kweni (Guro) culture, and the first language of most Gagu is Guro. Together the groups number nearly 400,000.

Kweni - often known by the Baoulé term Guro - are of Manding origin and are located between Bété to the west and Baoulé to the east in west-central Côte d'Ivoire. They entered the forest under pressure from Malinké migration; however, their movement east was halted by Baoulé. The last Kweni resistance to French colonial rule was in 1907. Over 50 territorial groupings formerly had an economic and military function, but intermarriage has brought cultural assimilation with Bété, Gagu and others. Kweni have no hereditary chiefs. They had no sense of communal identity before the French colonial era. Traditionally they grew plantain, manioc, yam and taro and more recently have moved into coffee, cocoa and cotton production. The migration of Kweni to work on southern palm oil plantations has disrupted marriage and family stability.

Because of the Sahelian drought in the 1970s large numbers of nomads and cattle herders began to move south with their herds into Côte d'Ivoire. Although welcomed by the government because of their contribution to beef production, they soon came into conflict with Senoufo farmers of the northern region whose fields were damaged by their herds.

Lebanese in Côte d'Ivoire number around 60,000, one of the largest Lebanese communities outside

Lebanon. Concentrated in distribution and retail sales, Lebanese occupy a marginal social position. They supported the PDCI at independence and maintain close ties to whichever regime is in power. With the liberalization of economic policies in the late 1980s Lebanese firms have become dominant over European concerns in the import and distribution of consumer goods.

Around 28 per cent of the population of Côte d'Ivoire consists of migrants from elsewhere in Africa; the largest number of these come from Burkina Faso, while others are from [Mali](#), [Ghana](#), [Guinea](#), [Nigeria](#), [Benin](#), [Liberia](#), [Senegal](#) and [Mauritania](#). There is also a non-African population of 60,000 Lebanese and 10,000 French, although many from these communities fled the violence that erupted in 2004. The population is roughly divided equally among practitioners of Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs. Many adherents of Christianity and Islam combine these beliefs with traditional beliefs. Most Muslims live in the north and most Christians in the south.

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History

Although the early history of Côte d'Ivoire largely remains a mystery, it is thought that the Gagu people were among its earliest inhabitants. Other groups, fleeing pressure from such kingdoms to the west as Mali and Asante, arrived only much later and absorbed many indigenous populations into their cultures. Mandé peoples, who claim lineage from the founders of the 12th century Mali Empire, moved into southern Côte d'Ivoire in the 16th to 18th centuries. The Baoulé and Agni - both sub-groups of the Akan - arrived only in the 1700s, and settled in the central region of today's Côte d'Ivoire. Their arrival pushed Krou peoples to the south and west.

Portuguese explorers arrived in the 15th century, but the inhospitable coastline and dense forest discouraged extensive contacts, and would also deter extensive slave-trading. French missionaries arrived in 1637, but it was not until 1843-1844 that [France](#) established its first formal protectorate in the area. The area of French control expanded, and Côte d'Ivoire was declared a French colony in 1893. Local peoples continued to resist French rule. The Malinké in the north under the leadership of Samory Touré fought the French until his capture in 1898. Other groups including the Baoulé, Dan, Bété and Dida also resisted French control, and armed resistance continued until 1915. France eventually forced local groups to relent by destroying crops and homes in a brutal campaign of 'pacification'.

France began production of such cash crops as millet, cocoa and coffee, making broad use of forced labour, from Côte d'Ivoire and Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso) to the north. During World War II, Nazi-allied Vichy France expanded the use of forced labour. In 1943 the French resistance movement under Charles de Gaulle captured control over all of French West Africa and was grateful for African support against the Vichy regime. In 1946, all French West Africans were granted French citizenship. Then in 1956 Côte d'Ivoire was granted substantial self-rule, expanding to full autonomy within the French Community in 1958. On 7 August 1960, Côte d'Ivoire gained total independence.

Veteran Baoulé politician Felix Houphouët-Boigny easily won election as Côte d'Ivoire's first president in 1960. He virtually suspended public politics in Côte d'Ivoire and subjected what remained to his stern and unrelenting control. His autocratic rule would continue until his death in 1993. Until 1990, the only legal political party was Houphouët-Boigny's Parti Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), dominated by the Akan ethnic group, in particular by Baoulé from the south. Akan comprise two-fifths of the population yet made up over half of the country's political leaders, with northern groups in particular facing exclusion. Beyond political repression, Houphouët-Boigny was able to hold on to power through relative economic prosperity fuelled by agricultural exports and the support of France and other western

countries. The agricultural economy attracted many workers from Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, Guinea and other African countries; many of them settled. Economic downturn in the 1980s forced Houphouët-Boigny to introduce austerity measures and increased competition for employment.

Upon Houphouët-Boigny's death in 1993, the president of the National Assembly, Henri Konan Bédié - another Baoulé - outmanoeuvred Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara to become president of Côte d'Ivoire. Ouattara resigned as prime minister in December 1993 and went on to form a rival party, the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR). In 1994 Bédié became the president of the PDCI. Bédié resisted pressure for democratic reforms and his regime gained a reputation for widespread corruption, but he retained the political backing of France. He won a fraudulent election in 1995, after pushing legislation through the National Assembly that led the disqualification of any candidate whose parents were not born in the country, and who had not lived in Côte d'Ivoire for the preceding five years. This conveniently removed chief rival Alassane Ouattara from the race.

During the 1995 campaign, Bédié coined the term 'Ivoirité' to denote genuine belonging to Côte d'Ivoire and consciously cast doubt on the citizenship of many northerners who descended from parents of neighbouring countries, or - increasingly - whose names simply sounded 'foreign' even if their families had been in Côte d'Ivoire for generations. In practice this often came to mean anyone from the predominantly Muslim ethnic Mandé or Senoufo groups. In short, the xenophobic concept of 'Ivoirité' dangerously polarized the country along north-south, Muslim-Christian, and interethnic lines.

In 1999 General Robert Guéï (of the Yacouba minority, a sub-group of the Mandé) seized power in a bloodless military coup - Côte d'Ivoire's first. He promoted his predecessor's xenophobic notion of 'Ivoirité', enshrining it in a new constitution. Ahead of October 2000 elections, he not only disqualified RDR leader Alassane Ouattara again, but also the candidate of the PDCI. His lone opponent was Laurent Gbagbo, (of the Bété minority, a sub-group of the Krou - concentrated in the south-west), the leader of the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI). When election returns showed that Gbagbo was ahead in the count, Guéï disbanded the election commission and claimed victory. Gbagbo's supporters took to the streets and Guéï fled the country. Alassane Ouattara called for new elections, but Laurent Gbagbo refused and embraced the concept of 'Ivoirité'. Gbagbo's supporters, backed by the southern-dominated military, turned on northerners, killing scores of them. Within days, Ouattara called for peace and recognized Gbagbo as president but the north-south divide had deepened.

Tensions continued and northern army units mutinied in September 2002. Robert Guéï, who had returned to the country, was killed at the outset in unclear circumstances and amid government claims of his involvement. The rebellious northern soldiers called themselves the Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), which fought loyalist, southern forces, resulting in thousands of deaths. The MPCI established its headquarters in the northern town of Bouaké and established control over the northern half of the country. French forces already in Côte d'Ivoire monitored a cease-fire agreed in October 2002. The following month, two rebel forces emerged in the west, south of the cease-fire line: the Yacouba-based Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) and the much smaller Mouvement pour la justice et la paix (MJP). MPIGO was backed by Liberian President Charles Taylor in retaliation for Gbagbo's support of anti-Taylor rebels in Liberia. Taylor lieutenants directly led operations that included Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters in support of MPIGO attacks in western Côte d'Ivoire. Together with the MJP, MPIGO called for Gbagbo's ouster and vowed to avenge the death of Robert Guéï.

In January 2003, western rebels clashed with French forces and 1,500 peacekeepers from several countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) joined 2,500 French forces in patrolling the buffer zone between the government-controlled south and MPCI-controlled north. That same month, France brokered the Linas-Marcoussis Accord between the government and rebels.

The agreement foresaw a government of national unity, including members of the New Forces, and a process to clarify citizenship and the land rights of immigrants and their descendents. President Gbagbo appointed Seydou Diarra, a Muslim northerner who had served as prime minister under Guéï, as the consensus prime minister, and agreed to rebel appointments to the defence and interior ministries. However, on the same day, Gbagbo issued instructions to radical youth groups affiliated with his FPI party to launch violent anti-French protests. Violence and intimidation in the south, including the commercial capital Abidjan, led 8,000 French nationals to flee the country.

In February 2003, the MPCI, MPIGO and MJP rebel organizations merged to become the Forces Nouvelles (New Forces), under the leadership of Guillaume Soro - a Senoufou from the far north, and a Catholic. Reflecting the make-up of its largest component, the MPCI, the New Forces largely consisted of Muslims who were ethnic Dioulas (northern Mandé) and Senoufos (a Voltaic people).

Prime Minister Diarra's unity government met for the first time in April 2003, after arrival of a vanguard from the new UN peacekeeping mission, UNOCI, whose mandate included protection of government ministers from the New Forces. In July 2003, Gbagbo and the New Forces declared the war over and agreed to establishment of a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme.

Yet periodic violence continued, worsening in 2004. In March 2004, as more UN peacekeepers deployed, Gbagbo's government launched a violent crackdown on street protests in Abidjan, killing over 120 of the peaceful protestors, some through summary execution. A new peace agreement in July 2004 set deadlines for implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Accord, but this too soon broke down. In November 2004, the Ivoirian air force bombed rebel positions, also killing nine French soldiers. In retaliation, France destroyed all of Côte d'Ivoire's small fleet of jet fighters. Anti-French riots, spurred by state media and President Gbagbo's party, led to another exodus of French and other western nationals, and the UN imposed an arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire.

Apart from this spike of violence in November 2004, an international buffer of 7,000 UN peacekeepers and 4,000 French troops has been successful in preventing the resumption of large-scale clashes. Following the failure of the January 2003 and July 2004 peace agreements, the two sides signed a new compact in April 2005, brokered in South Africa by the African Union. The agreement aimed to address northern concerns about identification, nationality and electoral laws, lead to the demobilization of militant groups linked to President Gbagbo, and provide for a transitional power-sharing government until October 2005 elections. Gbagbo agreed to let northerner Alassane Ouattara contest those elections, despite the constitutional provision banning candidates whose parents were not both Ivoirian.

With lagging implementation, and tension still palpable, in October 2005 the UN Security Council approved an extension of the provisional government until October 2006, albeit under an internationally appointed prime minister alongside President Gbagbo. Charles Konan Banny, a stalwart of the PDCI opposition party of former president Houphouët-Boigny, was selected by African Union mediators to replace Seydou Diarra as head of the fractious government. The news was met with renewed violent protests in Abidjan by Gbagbo's supporters in January 2006.

Adding to the turmoil of the north-south stalemate, in August 2006, a Dutch company, Trafigura Beheer B.V., dumped 400 tonnes of toxic chemical waste in and nearby Abidjan in an effort to save money. At least seven people died and over 80,000 sought medical assistance.

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Governance

Under Côte d'Ivoire's constitution, the president is elected by popular vote to five-year terms. The president appoints the prime minister and his commander of the armed forces. Members of the 225-seat unicameral National Assembly are likewise elected to five-year terms.

A number of these constitutional provisions have not been observed in practice. President Gbagbo's term and that of the members of the National Assembly - dominated by his party - were due to expire in late 2005, but have continued. In 2005, African Union mediators selected the prime minister in line with a resolution of the UN Security Council, and in 2006 the Security Council transferred authority for the armed forces to that prime minister.

The government of Laurent Gbagbo has severely curbed media freedom and used thugs from the youth group controlled by his party and close to his wife to intimidate and assault critical journalists. The judiciary is controlled by the government, and in the rebel-controlled north, there is no judiciary.

Whereas Côte d'Ivoire's lucrative cocoa, coffee and other agricultural exports once fuelled the most affluent society in West Africa, rampant corruption now diverts many of the proceeds to government, military and rebel leaders - providing all with an incentive to continue the wartime economy.

Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

In November 2006, with elections again cancelled and leaders on both sides of the north-south divide cultivating ethnic division, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the provisional government serving alongside President Gbagbo until October 2007 elections. Though the Security Council resolution transferred military and civilian authority from Gbagbo to appointed Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, Gbagbo immediately announced that 'any articles, any clauses in the resolution which constitute violations of Cote d'Ivoire's constitution will not be applied'.

The political stalemate continued until March 2007, when Burkina Faso mediated a new peace agreement between Gbagbo and New Forces leader Guillaume Soro, under which Soro would become prime minister and the country would be reunified. The following month Gbagbo again declared that the war was over, but this was immediately followed by new violence, and in June 2007 would-be assassins fired a rocket at Soro's airplane.

Nevertheless, tenuous progress has followed. UNOCI peacekeepers began ceding the buffer area to joint patrols by government troops and New Forces, and the DDR programme got underway. Critically, in light of the identity issues at the core of the conflict, mobile courts began circulating in September 2007 to issue birth certificates to those lacking them. This is important to northerners who want identification that will allow them to vote whenever elections are finally held.

There is no date set for elections. In January 2008 the UN Security Council extended the mandate of UNOCI, now 8,000-strong, for another year.

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