

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF CRISIS OR BACK ON THE BRINK?

OUTLOOK ON THE 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN IVORY COAST

Valentin Katzer

INTRODUCTION

West Africa is currently running a veritable election marathon: Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Niger, Ghana – the cards in the region are being reshuffled in the 2015 and 2016 electoral period.¹ Past experience indicates that polls always prove to be a test for security, as well as social and political stability in the electoral democracies between Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea. The presidential and semi-presidential systems of the region have repeatedly given rise to tension and conflict in the past, and even more so where the newly elected head of state is endowed with extensive powers. The “Présidentielles” in Ivory Coast five years ago resulted in a particularly dramatic escalation. Due to the Civil War (2002/2007), the elections, which had been originally scheduled for 2005, were postponed several times, and were finally held against the backdrop of a deeply divided country.

The first ballot of the belated 2010 presidential elections initially put southern incumbent Laurent Gbagbo ahead, but during the run-off, northern challenger Alassane Ouattara was certified to have received the highest number of votes by the Independent Electoral Commission (Commission Électorale Indépendante de Côte d’Ivoire). The Constitutional Council, however, declared Gbagbo the victor. Both candidates took their oath, resulting in two Ivorian presidents being in office at the same time. When

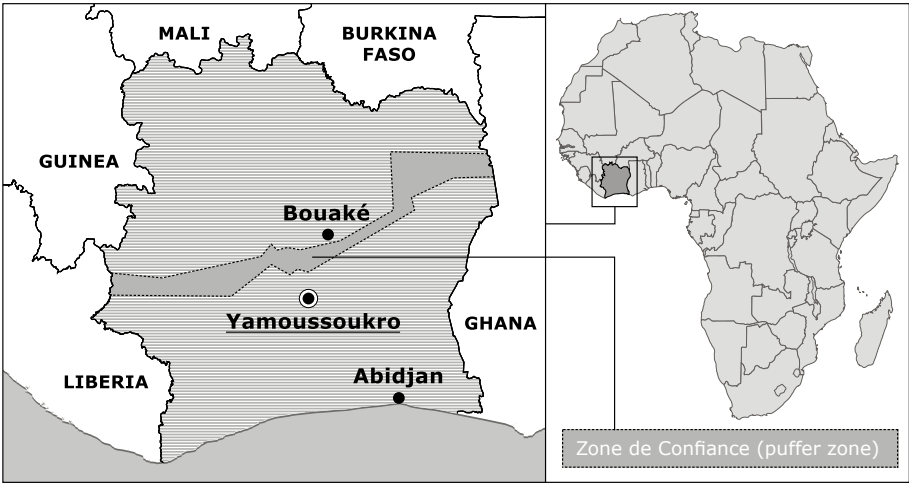


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1 | In March 2015, Jonathan Goodluck was defeated by his challenger Muhammadu Buhari in the race for the presidency of Nigeria. In April 2015, the Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé was confirmed in office. In the same month, parliamentary elections were held in Benin, where the ruling party of President Boni Yayi emerged as the strongest political force despite suffering some losses.

former rebel leader Guillaume Soro submitted his resignation as prime minister and declared his loyalty to Ouattara on the very same day, the government of national unity was history. Once again, the north and the south of the country were irreconcilably divided.

Fig. 1
**Factual Division of Ivory Coast
Prior to the Peace Agreement in 2007**



The map shows the factual division of Ivory Coast during the Civil War. The north was controlled by the rebels, and the south was ruled by government troops. The 2007 Ouagadougou peace accord ended the war without resolving the lines of conflict entirely. | Source: © racken.

The democratic standards of the election are a source of controversy. African election observers and eyewitnesses reported that Gbagbo voters in the north were subjected to intimidation and violence, and that there was massive electoral fraud in favour of Ouattara.² The European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission, on the other hand, spoke of broadly free elections in their final report, and identified the Gbagbo camp in particular as a source

2 | The independence of these African election observers is difficult to assess. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reports that residents of the region largely confirmed their assessment in telephone conversations with the newspaper. "Electoral Commission declares Ouattara the winner in Ivory Coast", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 Dec 2010, p. 6.

of irregularities.³ Even though the international community largely stood united behind Ouattara, Gbagbo himself stubbornly refused to acknowledge his defeat. Mediation efforts of African institutions and statesmen failed; instead, the struggle for power escalated into a bloody confrontation resulting in more than 3,000 casualties. Only a UN military intervention with extensive French support put an end to the bloodshed and decided the conflict in favour of Alassane Ouattara, who has since ruled the country as president.



Ruins of a school in western Ivory Coast in 2011: Approximately 30,000 residents of the ethnic group Wé, which is considered loyal to Gbagbo, fled from the pro-Ouattara militia Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire. | Source: Michael Fleshman, Catholic mission, flickr ©110.

Against the backdrop of this traumatic episode in Ivory Coast, the international community is anxiously awaiting the next presidential election on 25 October 2015. Is a repeat of the events of 2010/2011 on the cards? The present article will firstly examine the socio-economic framework conditions and social climate in the country a few weeks before the vote. This is followed by an assessment of the main candidates and their chances of success in the race for the presidency.

3 | "Overall, both ballots were marked by a peaceful and disciplined atmosphere, and are therefore regarded as positive." Translated by the authors from Mission d'observation de l'Union Européenne électorale, Côte d'Ivoire. *Rapport Final: Élection Présidentielle 31 octobre – 28 novembre*, p. 6, http://eeas.europa.eu/eueom/pdf/missions/rapport-final-25012011_fr.pdf (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

THE FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

Economics

Apart from the occasionally sighted, remaining UN patrols in blue helmets, at first glance very little in Ivory Coast serves as a reminder of the dramatic conflict five years ago.⁴

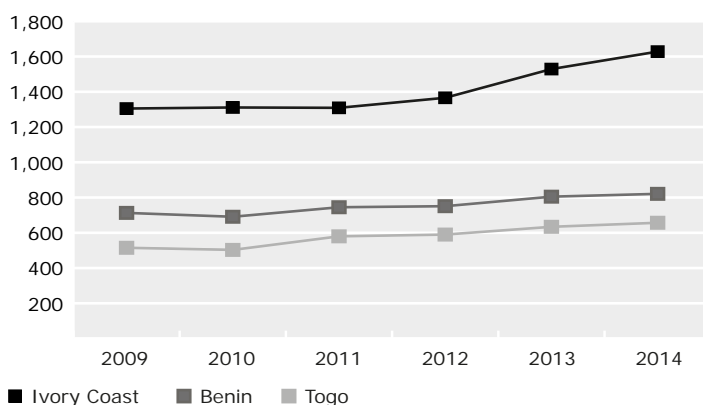
The economic capital of Abidjan, home to a third of the total Ivorian population within its metropolitan area of seven million people, is booming: new roads, bridges and building complexes are under construction everywhere. The skyline and upmarket Cocody and Plateau districts give the city a modern flair.

President Ouattara, former head of the West African Central Bank (Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, BCEAO), has set the ambitious goal of turning Ivory Coast into an emerging market by 2020.⁵ This is to be accomplished by significant investments⁶ and a broad-based reform program to structurally build the attractiveness of Ivory Coast as a business location.⁷ The *Doing Business Report* of the World Bank considers Ivory Coast to be on the right track, and counts the nation among the most reform-driven in the world.⁸ The success of Ouattara's liberal

- 4 | The current UN mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI) began in 2004 and was subsequently repeatedly and significantly expanded during the escalation of 2010/2011. Following the noticeable relaxation of the situation in the country after 2011, the UN contingent has been reduced continuously. The current mandate expires in June 2016. Cf. United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, "ONUCI", <http://www.onuci.org> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 5 | The BCEAO is the central bank of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), with the CFA franc as common currency. The fixed exchange rate is around 656 CFA francs to one euro. Prior to joining BCEAO, Ouattara was director of the International Monetary Fund for Africa.
- 6 | The current Ivorian Development Plan (2012-2015) includes plans to invest the equivalent of 16.8 billion euros or 54 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2014. République de Côte d'Ivoire, "Plan national de développement 2012 2015", 2012, p. 53 and The World Bank, "Côte d'Ivoire", <http://worldbank.org/en/country/cotedivoire> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 7 | For instance, starting a new business in Cote d'Ivoire is now possible in 24 hours according to the competent authority (CEPICI, <http://cepici.gouv.ci>). In Nigeria, this process takes 31 days. The World Bank data refers to the period from 2010 to 2014. The value for Côte d'Ivoire at the time was seven days. The World Bank, "Time required to start a business (days)", <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.REG.DURS/countries> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 8 | Cf. The World Bank, *Doing Business 2015. Going Beyond Efficiency*, 29 Oct 2014, p. 5, <http://doingbusiness.org/reports/global-reports/doing-business-2015> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

economic policy is also reflected in the key economic figures: the Centre de Promotion of Investissements en Côte d'Ivoire (CEPICI) registered a boost in private investments from 220 billion CFA francs in 2011 to 513 billion CFA francs in 2013.⁹ The economy has been growing by eight to ten per cent over the past three years, inflation rates are low, and the Ivorian per capita income is disproportionately high in comparison with other regional franco-phone countries of West Africa.

Fig. 2

GDP per Capita in U.S. Dollars

Source: Own illustration. Data: The World Bank, African Economic Outlook, <http://africaneconomicoutlook.org/en/outlook> (accessed 16 Sep 2015).

Although the export-oriented agriculture from which two-thirds of Ivorians derive their income remains one of the pillars of the Ivorian economy, the manufacturing industry is also increasingly adding value in Ivory Coast.¹⁰ Industrial growth of 8.4 per cent in the most recent period, the country is ranked 20th in the world.¹¹ The official aim is an increase in the share of value adding industry to GDP to 40 per cent by 2020. The focal points are on the

9 | Vincent Kouassi, "Côte d'Ivoire: un leadership qui s'affirme", *Côte d'Ivoire Economie*, Jan 2015, p.6-8.

10 | Ivory Coast is the world's largest cocoa producer. Otherwise, coffee, cotton and fruits are also major food crops for export. According to calculations by the French Embassy in Ivory Coast, around 38 per cent of Ivorian exports in 2013 were agricultural goods, 29 per cent oil, and 18 per cent processed products. Ambassade de France en Cote d'Ivoire, "Les échanges commerciaux de la Côte d'Ivoire en 2013", Jun 2014, http://diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/COTE_D_IVOIRE_-_Le_commerce_exterieur_en_2013_cle051f3e.pdf (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

11 | CIA, "Côte d'Ivoire", *The World Factbook*, 25 Aug 2015, <http://cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iv.html> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

exploitation and utilisation of the country's rich natural resources, as well as the further processing of agricultural produce.¹²

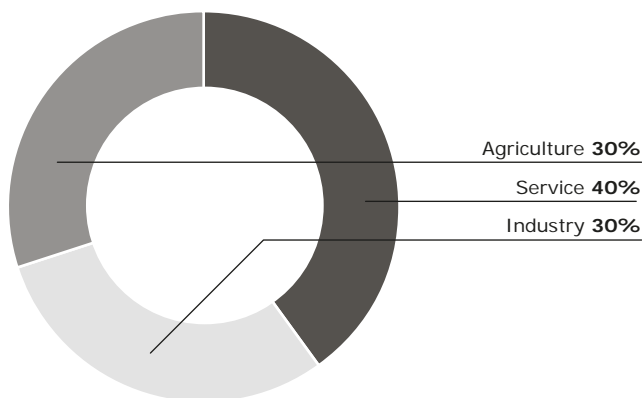


World Cocoa Conference in Abidjan: The Ivory Coast is the world's largest cocoa producer. In the future, however, the industrial value creation is also to be increased. | Source: © Gbekide Barnus, picture alliance/ Panapress/MAXPPP.

Once again, the confidence of international organisations, investors and lenders in the (economic) future of Ivory Coast is gaining momentum: back in 2014, for instance, the African Development Bank relocated its headquarters back to Abidjan after eleven years in exile in Tunisia, and the largest Ivorian Airport, Félix-Houphouët-Boigny, obtained the approval of U.S. authorities to operate direct flights to the United States after 15 years of negotiations, and Ivory Coast successfully returned to the international capital market, where the demand for its bonds, with their comparatively moderate interest yield of 6.625 per cent, was exceeded many times over.

12 | "La Côte d'Ivoire veut accroître la part de l'industrie dans le PIB", *Radio France Internationale (RFI)*, 11 Jul 2014, <http://rfi.fr/afrique/20140711-cote-ivoire-jean-claude-brou-veut-mettre-avant-son-industrie> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

Fig. 3

GDP Ivory Coast by Sectors

Source: Own illustration. Data: Ministère de l'Industrie et des Mines, Ivory Coast und Ministère de l'Agriculture, Ivory Coast, "Politique Industrielle", <http://industrie.gouv.ci/index.php/page/politique-industrielle> (accessed 14 Aug 2015); Ministère de l'Agriculture, http://agriculture.gouv.ci/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=122&Itemid=301 (accessed 14 Aug 2015).

Historical Reappraisal of the Civil War

However, the economic progress and relative stability cannot mask the fact that the political division of the country has not yet been overcome and conflicts continue to smoulder beneath the surface. The reappraisal of the civil war remains a central problem. The reconciliation commission set up by the government (Commission Dialogue, Vérité et Réconciliation, CDVR) was only partially able to meet its goals.¹³ The panel was launched in 2011 and only commenced work three years later. Based on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission model, the CDVR was designed as a forum for dialogue, but was not endowed with legal powers. Further criticism stems from the fact that the government did not publish the 2014 final report of the commission. In addition to the superordinate objective of national reconciliation, the successor organisation Commission Nationale pour la Réconciliation et l'indemnisation of Victimes (CONARIV) is also tasked with the awarding of material compensation to the 74,000 war

13 | Cf. Commission Dialogue Vérité et Réconciliation, <http://cdvr.ci> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

victims officially registered to date. Victims' associations regard this as an important first step, but fundamental criticism of the Commission's structure remains.¹⁴



Fleeing from the civil war: In 2011, numerous Ivorians attempted to get to Liberia by crossing the Cavalla and Cestos River in order to escape the fighting. | Source: Derek Markwell, UK Department for International Development, flickr ©.

The penal reappraisal of the past before the Ivorian courts is also subject to several deficiencies. International observers have criticised the disregard for legal standards in the criminal prosecutions, and have questioned the independence of the Ivorian judiciary time and again.¹⁵ In fact, to this day mainly members of the old regime were prosecuted. They have criticised the process as "victor's justice". Furthermore, the proceedings have not addressed crimes against humanity as documented by the United Nations and Human Rights Watch for both factions to date; rather, the focus has been on economic crimes or a planned "attack on national security".¹⁶

14 | Cf. "Côte d'Ivoire: indemnisation dès juillet", *BBC*, 6 May 2015, http://bbc.com/afrique/region/2015/05/150506_cote_divoire_compensation (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

15 | Cf. Human Rights Watch, "Rapport mondial 2015, Côte d'Ivoire", <http://hrw.org/fr/world-report/2015/country-chapters/132199> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

16 | Cf. "Report of the independent, international commission of inquiry on Côte d'Ivoire", Human Rights Council, 17th session, 6 Jun 2011, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.48_Extract.pdf (accessed 31 Aug 2015); United Nations Security Council, "Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire", 28 Mar 2013, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/197 (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

For quite some time there were concerns that the tens of thousands of irregular fighters under arms since the civil war could jeopardise the orderly conduct of the elections and the country's stability. The loyalties of the various militias are often opaque. Some groups are considered supporters of President Ouattara, while others sympathise with the former ruler Gbagbo. Often, material interests are of primary importance, which is in turn accompanied by the possibility of political instrumentalisation. The agency established by the government for their disarmament and reintegration (Autorité pour le désarmement, Demobilisation et la Reintégration, ADDR) initially seemed to fail to get a grip on the issue. Faced with the risk of renewed escalation, the Ivorian Episcopal Conference urged in May 2015 increased efforts to provide the mostly young combatants, who often enjoyed little education, with prospects in civilian life.¹⁷ By now, the ADDR is looking back on a period of success: Until the official deadline at the end of June, which offered exchange of war military equipment for impunity, two months of vocational training and financial assistance, just short of 58,000 disarmaments of ex-combatants were reported. The estimated 10,000 remaining fighters nonetheless remain a source of uncertainty, prompting the UN Security Council to extend the ONUCI mission (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire) in Ivory Coast until June 2016.¹⁸

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International Rankings

The continued weak Ivory Coast ranking at 171 out of 187 in the United Nations *Human Development Index 2014* is regarded by Ouattara critics as confirmation of their allegations that his

- 2015); Human Rights Watch, "Transformer les discours en réalité. L'heure de réclamer des comptes pour les crimes internationaux graves perpétrés en Côte d'Ivoire", Apr 2013, http://hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/CDI0413fr_ForUpload.pdf (accessed 31 Aug 2015). Simone Gbagbo, wife of the former president, was sentenced to a long prison term in early 2015. Cf. "Côte d'Ivoire: Simone Gbagbo condamnée à 20 ans de prison", *Jeune Afrique*, 10 Mar 2015, <http://jeuneafrique.com/226286/politique> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 17 | Cf. "Côte d'Ivoire: 74 000 ex-combattants à désarmer d'ici fin juin", *RFI*, 12 May 2015, <http://rfi.fr/afrique/20150512-cote-ivoire-74-000-ex-combattants-desarmer-reinserer-demobiliser-gbagbo-addr> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 18 | Cf. Joan Tilouine/Alexis Adélé, "En Côte d'Ivoire, les ex-combattants sommés à rendre les armes", *Le Monde Afrique*, 1 Jul 2015, http://lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/07/01/e_4666002_3212.html (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

agenda is too narrowly confined to economics at the expense of other significant parameters of democratic and sustainable development.¹⁹ However, a glance at other development indices shows there is an undeniably positive trend in spite of persistent deficits in the country. In the “good governance” section, the *Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2014* reported Ivory Coast as having made the biggest improvements of the 54 listed African countries compared to the previous year.²⁰ Ivory Coast rose 21 places of the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2014* compared to the reference year 2010, to rank 95 of the 130 countries covered.²¹ Even though the fight against corruption is facing a long, uphill struggle, the efforts made by the government are nonetheless obvious: Ivory Coast ranked 146 of 178 countries in the *Corruption Perception Index* of Transparency International in 2010, managing to rise to rank 115 in 2014.²²

THE RACE FOR THE PRESIDENCY

Officially, the race for the presidency has not even begun. According to Ivorian law, the election campaign period lasts a mere two weeks (10 to 23 October), so no election posters are as yet to be found in the streets of Abidjan. However, the 14 candidates have been vying for position in the media for the past several months.

The Incumbent

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Regardless of the actual outcomes of their mandates, the incumbent (regional) presidents tend to hold an advantage in political competition from their office. President Alas-

sane Ouattara tends to naturally have pervasive media presence, which he is also skilled at utilising for his purposes. While his numerous challengers must square off against both the incumbent and each other, Ouattara can afford to enjoy his presidential aura,

19 | United Nations Development Program, “Human Development Index 2014”, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

20 | Cf. *Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2014*, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, <http://moibrahimfoundation.org/iia> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

21 | Bertelsmann Stiftung, “BTI 2003-2014_Ergebnisse”, http://bti-project.de/uploads/tx_itao_download/BTI2003-2014_Ergebnisse.xls (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

22 | Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2010*, <http://transparency.org/cpi2010/results> (accessed 31 Aug 2015); “Corruption Perceptions Index 2014: Results”, <http://transparency.org/cpi2014/results> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

and avoid direct confrontations. Following his policy agenda, the present head of state's advertising for another term is primarily based on the economic track record of his first term, as well as his ambitious development goals for the year 2020. Since the economy is undergoing noticeable growth compared to the period of widespread stagnation from 1999 to 2011 and forecasts for the coming years project a continuation of the positive trend, and many Ivorians accordingly hope to win their share of the rising prosperity of the nation under the current president, this would appear to be quite a promising strategy.



A collapsed building in the working-class area of Abidjan: The Ivorian population does not benefit equally from the economic growth in the Ivory Coast under President Ouattara. The difference in prosperity is clearly visible in Abidjan too. | Source: © Cyrille Bah, picture alliance/Anadolu Agency.

Nevertheless, the economic situation is also a starting point for criticism of Ouattara's policy: To date, the benefits of the strong economic growth of recent years have been distributed extremely unevenly among the population. The prosperity of the middle and upper classes, visibly embodied in expensive cars, villas and luxury shops, dominates the town of Abidjan, as does the struggle of the poor and poorest for their daily bread. Unemployment remains a key socio-economic problem, and even well-educated Ivorians frequently fail to find a job in line with their qualifications. Conversations with supposedly ordinary people, such as the employees of private security companies visible across the cityscape, commonly reveal academics who held well-paid jobs

before the crisis, and now have to contend with little more than the minimum wage of 60,000 CFA francs (92 euros) per month.²³ Since numerous people tend to be dependent on the income of a single family member, the situation of many workers remains precarious.²⁴ The number of Ivorians below the poverty line of two U.S. dollars per day has remained stagnant at 46 per cent since 2012, which is only three per cent less than in 2008.²⁵ The World Bank regards this high level, particularly when compared to economic growth and per capita income, as “worrying”.²⁶ If just around half of the population are largely excluded from the welfare gains of the country, the question as to how the economic growth may be channelled into more inclusive and therefore sustainable economic development naturally tends to pose itself.

Between Alliance and Competition: The Governing Parties RDR and PDCI

In any case, Ouattara can count on the broad support of his candidacy by the Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et Houphouëtistes of la Paix (RHDP) during the election campaign. This alliance is composed of the presidential party Rassemblement des Républicains de Côte d’Ivoire (RDR) and four other parties of the liberal-conservative spectrum. Among them, the Parti Démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) of long-standing President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who ruled Ivory Coast from its independence in 1960 until his death in 1993, and whom Alassane Ouattara

- 23 | The minimum wage was increased by the Ivorian government by 64 per cent from 36,607 to 60,000 CFA francs in November 2014. Cf. Présidence de la République du Côte d’Ivoire, “Décret N°2013-791 du 20 Novembre 2013 Portant Revalorisation du Salaire Minimum interprofessionnel garanti, en abrégé smig”, 20 Nov 2013, http://sgg.gouv.ci/photo_doc/1399281753Decret_N_2013_711_du_18_octobre_2013.pdf (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 24 | While local produce such as fruits and vegetables, as well as services are comparatively affordable in Côte d’Ivoire, the prices of most imported goods, telecommunications and electricity are higher than in Germany. For instance, in Abidjan, the monthly minimum wage equivalent of three euros per day buys a basket of two baguettes (0.50 euros), two pieces of fruit (0.50 euros), one litre of petrol (one euro) and three litres of mineral water (one euro). For further information see “International Salary Calculator. Cost of Living Review by City and Country: Côte d’Ivoire, Abidjan”, Xpatulator, http://www.xpatulator.com/cost-of-living-review/Cote-D'Ivoire-Abidjan_58.cfm (accessed 31 Aug 2015).
- 25 | Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Côte d’Ivoire, Country report 2008, 2012, 2014”, p. 2.
- 26 | “Pour la Banque mondiale, le niveau de pauvreté en Côte d’Ivoire reste ‘inquiétant’”, *Jeune Afrique*, 12 Nov 2014, <http://jeuneafrique.com/5203/economie> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

served as prime minister from 1990-1993.²⁷

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that time, Henri Konan Bédié, who succeeded Houphouët-Boigny as president from 1993 until the 1999 military coup, united more than 25 per cent of the vote in the first ballot behind Laurent Gbagbo (38 per cent) and Alassane Ouattara (32 per cent). In the subsequent run-off election, he supported the challenger Alassane Ouattara, and paved the way to his victory over incumbent Gbagbo. This alliance is certainly remarkable given the rather adversarial history of the two statesmen. Notably, it was Bédié who prevented Ouattara's candidacy in the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections citing the controversial concept of *ivoirité*.²⁸ Since the closing of ranks, the PDCI has been in government in coalition with the presidential party, appointed the current prime minister, Daniel Kablan Duncan, and is therefore inextricably allied with Ouattara's politics. Faced with the obvious difficulty of having to distinguish himself from the President in this situation without discrediting his own government work, party leader Henri Konan Bédié made a controversial decision in summer 2014. He announced that his party would refrain from launching a candidacy in the 2015 presidential elections in support of Ouattara. The reason might be a political deal for 2020: Ouattara, who has already announced that he has no intention of succumbing to the "African disease" and intends to resign after the constitutional two mandates, would then express his support for the election of the PDCI candidate as outgoing president.²⁹

27 | Before he was elected in 1960 as the first president of Côte d'Ivoire, Felix Houphouët-Boigny was instrumental in shaping French decolonisation during his service as minister in the late 1950s. He only had to assert himself against a political opponent in an election after the end of the one-party system in 1990. He won a clear victory against challenger Laurent Gbagbo.

28 | The original national unifying concept of *ivoirité* became the subject of increasing political exploitation after 1993 to marginalise certain ethnic groups and religious communities or eliminate political opponents. According to Bédié's definition, only persons whose four grandparents were born in the country are to be regarded as Ivorians, and thus become president of Ivory Coast. The north of the country, where Alassane Ouattara also has his roots, is particularly home to many people with foreign roots. Cf. "Alassane Ouattara et Henri Konan Bédié: amicalement vôtre", *Jeune Afrique*, 31 Dec 2014, <http://jeuneafrique.com/36799/politique> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

29 | "African disease" refers to the tendency of some statesmen of the continent to cling to power into old age, and to stay in power for further tenures by constitutional amendments. The most recent attempt of the former Burkinabe ruler in November 2014 failed due to massive civil society protests, and ended with the dismissal of Blaise Compaoré.



Alassane Ouattara on the campaign trail: Contrary to some of the other African heads of state, Ouattara has already announced that he will retire constitutionally from the position as president after two terms in office. | Source: © Franck Castel, Wostok Press/picture alliance/dpa.

Quite a daring political move. That's because no one can predict how the political landscape will develop in the next five years with certainty, and whether promises made now will be held later. Should there be a break between the coalition parties in the coming years, or if RDR politicians decide to pursue their own quest for power over prior arrangements, then PCDI would find itself in a most unfavourable starting position in 2020. In particular, there is rumour from within the RDR ranks that the current parliamentary speaker and former rebel leader Guillaume Soro has ambitions for the presidency.³⁰ He enjoys excellent relations with the head of state, and, at only 42 years of age, is already regarded as the second most powerful man in Ivory Coast.³¹ Hamed Bakayoko,

30 | Soro was one of the central figures on the side of Ouattara during the 2010/2011 civil war, and is therefore strongly linked with the security sector. While his critics assert that he committed war crimes during that period, this has never been officially confirmed by an independent body. Regarding the allegations cf. "Banny – Soro, la guerre est déclarée: Banny accuse Soro de crimes et de casses de la BCEAO 'Soro devrait chercher à répondre de ses crimes et de ses casses à la BCEAO'", *Ivoirebusiness.net*, 21 Mar 2015, <http://ivoirebusiness.net/?q=articles/banny-%E2%80%93-soro-la-guerre-est-d%C3%A9clar%C3%A9e-banny-accuse-soro-de-crimes-et-de-casses-de-la-bceao-%C2%AB> (accessed 31 Aug 2015); "Crimes Ouattara-Soro: Listes des 134 fusillés, égorgés et disparus de Toulepleu", *La Dépêche d'Abidjan*, 8 Aug 2015, http://ladepechedabidjan.info/Crimes-Ouattara-Soro-Listes-des-134-fusilles-egorges-et-disparus-de-Toulepleu_a15095.html (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

31 | "Côte d'Ivoire: Guillaume Soro, ex-rebelle haut perché", *Jeune Afrique*, 4 Mar 2015, <http://jeuneafrique.com/225978/politique> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

who as interior minister has been tasked with key political issues such as the reform of the Electoral Commission or the reintegration of ex-combatants also has excellent prospects for succeeding Ouattara. At the age of 49, he is also part of the RDR junior squad.³²

Some of the PDCI do not wish to pursue this risky path, and are insisting on picking their own candidates for this year's presidential elections. Four well-known party members have already thrown their hats into the ring: Amara Essy, Charles Konan Banny, Kouadio Konan Bertin and Jérôme Kablan

Brou. The erstwhile close associate of Felix Houphouët-Boigny and former foreign minister Amara Essy is rumoured to have the best chances of success. As a diplomat, he acquired great international prestige as

Amara Essy presents himself as a "candidate of the reconciliation", and, in fact he is regarded as untainted by the civil war due to his absence of several decades from Ivory Coast.

President of the General Assembly of the United Nations and the African Union. Amara presents himself as a "candidate of the reconciliation", and, in fact he is regarded as untainted by the civil war in the eyes of many Ivorians due to his absence of several decades from Ivory Coast; a plus that none of the other candidates can claim for themselves, no matter what party they belong to. Amara's critics are trying to use his international work against him, accusing him of too long an absence from home. Charles Konan Banny started his career at the West African central bank BCEAO before he was appointed prime minister from 2005 to 2007. In 2011, he was appointed head of the Reconciliation Commission by President Ouattara. Critics regarded this as an attempt to prevent his candidacy in the 2015 elections. At the end of 2014, Banny resigned from his post and announced his candidature to the highest public office. Kouadio Konan Bertin once led the PDCI youth organisation. At the age of 46, he is a young politician by African standards, and has been a vehement opponent of the alliance of his party with President Ouattara's RDR for many years. Jérôme Kablan Brou was Vice President of the National Assembly under President Henri Konan Bédié and is an experienced politician, but in the past has been pulling strings more in the background. His low public profile is therefore considered his greatest shortcoming.³³

32 | "Hamed Bakayoko, le premier flic de Côte d'Ivoire", *Jeune Afrique*, 4 Mar 2015, <http://jeuneafrique.com/225976/politique> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

33 | Cf. Maureen Grisot, "Côte d'Ivoire: Qui sont les quatre frondeurs du PDCI?", *Le Monde Afrique*, 28 Feb 2015, http://lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/02/28/c_4585142_3212.html (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

The Opposition Alliance Coalition Nationale pour le Changement (CNC)

All four candidates joined the oppositional alliance Coalition Nationale pour le Changement (CNC) in mid-May, although Amara Essy has not yet signed the Charter. The CNC counts public figures and presidential candidates of ideologically rather different parties among its ranks. Mamadou Koulibaly, Chairman of the Liberal Party LIDER (Liberté et Démocratie pour la République), represents an entirely different policy than Aboudramane Sangre and Laurent Akoun from the socialist FPI.³⁴ It is therefore not surprising that there are very few unifying elements within the heterogeneous union beyond the stated goal of preventing Ouattara from winning a second term. A mere few weeks after its establish-

The CNC election campaign is primarily aimed at questioning the presidential qualities of the incumbent, and to demand more efforts for national reconciliation; Ouattara's economic record would not offer much of a target in any case.

ment, an internal disagreement regarding the exact interpretation of the charter and the political agenda of the CNC arose. The CNC election campaign is primarily aimed at questioning the presidential qualities of the incumbent, and to demand more efforts for national reconciliation; Ouattara's economic record would not offer much of a target in any case. As already indicated, there is actually an urgent need for a reappraisal of the civil war. The utopian call for the immediate and unconditional release of Laurent Gbagbo and his supporters, however, nourishes doubts about the constructive intentions, desire for reconciliation, and multipartisan functioning of the CNC. Furthermore, the coalition calls for the replacement of the electoral commission, which claim to be partial, with a new body prior to the October 2015 presidential elections, and the implementation of electoral reforms, which is an impossible undertaking for logistical reasons alone. So far, the CNC therefore does not present itself as a cohesive unit that might yield a joint, serious competitor for the incumbent. The agreement to appoint Charles Konan Banny as head of the coalition, which was reached at the end of July, was immediately followed by the restriction that this does not

34 | Mamadou Koulibaly was acting president of the Ivorian National Assembly for eleven years. In 2011, he left the FPI and founded the party LIDER. Aboudramane Sangre acted as foreign and prime minister, among other roles. Laurent Akoun previously held the post of Deputy Secretary General of the FPI. In 2012, he was sentenced to a six-month prison sentence for assault on public order. Cf. "Six mois de prison ferme pour Laurent Akoun, n°2 du FPI", *RFI*, 31 Aug 2012, <http://rfi.fr/afrique/20120831-cote-ivoire-verdict-proces-laurent-akoun-six-mois-ferme-fpi> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

constitute any preliminary decision on the candidacy.³⁵ As a result six CNC members continue to compete for the presidency, which will undoubtedly boost Ouattara's chances of an election victory.

Acid Test for the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI)

The largest opposition party, the socialist FPI of former ruler Laurent Gbagbo, would not be expected to win the election in its current constitution. The party's boycott of the parliamentary elections in late 2011, protesting the Gbagbo's arrest, deprived the party of the opportunity to distinguish itself as a serious alternative to the ruling majority through constructive opposition work in the National Assembly. Furthermore, the FPI has been weakened internally by several months of infighting, some of which was even subject to court proceedings. The pragmatic wing around Pascal Affi N'Guessan, the party chairman, is looking to appoint fresh candidates and launch a substantive critique of government policy. The other wing consists of the faithful followers of the ex-president, who was indicted for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. They still regard Laurent Gbagbo as the legitimate head of state of Ivory Coast, and are expecting his speedy return to power. The attempt to reappoint him as a first step to the party leadership was initially stopped by judicial decision at the end of 2014, which was an important stage victory for Pascal Affi N'Guessan. Nevertheless, the Gbagbo camp is unswervingly determined in its approach. The wing's recent call to boycott the elections on 25 October is further fuel to the intraparty conflict.³⁶ The FPI is not expected to overcome the internal split and return to its former strength any time soon. A breakup of the party cannot be ruled out.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

All in all, President Alassane Ouattara is in rather a comfortable starting position. Even though he cannot count on official support in the election campaign from abroad, the international community, and especially the most important economic and strategic partner of the Ivory Coast, France, are quite sympathetic to a further

35 | Cf. "Côte d'Ivoire: Charles Konan Banny dirige la Coalition nationale pour le changement", *OEil d'Afrique*, 24 Jul 2015, <http://oeildafrique.com/cote-divoire-charles-konan-banny-dirige-la-coalition-nationale-pour-le-changement> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

36 | Cf. "Côte d'Ivoire: le FPI tendance Gbagbo appelle au boycott de la présidentielle", *Jeune Afrique*, 18 Aug 2015, <http://jeuneafrique.com/257686/politique> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

Ouattara mandate. He did, after all, succeed in stabilising Ivory Coast politically after a decade of civil war and economic stagnation, and to bring the country back to the growth path. Against this backdrop, many countries are willing to overlook the aforementioned shortcomings of the Ouattara presidency, and hope for improvement in his second, last term of office.



Project "Partnership for Transition": Since the crisis in 2010/11, the European Commission, has supported the Ivory Coast among others in strengthening social cohesion in conflict regions through different projects. | Source: Anouk Delafortrie, European Commission, ECHO, flickr ©11©.

The fragmented and fractious opposition, which is currently more concerned with itself than with the political opponent, is little cause for alarm to the incumbent at the moment. Some commentators are even invoking the image of an open boulevard as the only obstacle between Ouattara and his second term. However, should the opposition manage to close ranks and agree on a common candidate by the second ballot, the race may turn out to be tight after all.³⁷ Both camps are currently faced with the major issue that interest in this year's presidential election has scarcely increased among the population. The widespread assumption that the election outcome is already decided makes it difficult for both the incumbent and the opposition candidates to mobilise their own supporters. Furthermore, the long years of political infighting

37 | Cf. "Côte d'Ivoire: la présidentielle, un boulevard pour Alassane Ouattara?", *RFI*, 8 Aug 2015, <http://rfi.fr/afrique/20150808-cote-ivoire-presidentielle-boulevard-alassane-ouattara-mandat-rhd-fpi> (accessed 31 Aug 2015).

have shaken the confidence of many people in the politicians, and led to a noticeable disenchantment with politics in the country. Particularly young Ivorians are also asking for a true alternative to the incumbent politicians, who have dominated the political stage and also the current election campaign for decades. Whatever the outcome of this year's election, the political sphere in Ivory Coast is faced with the major challenge of regaining lost confidence, and thereby building the foundation of a functioning democracy.

Are they safely on the other side of the crisis – or back on the brink? Both the government and the opposition have the power to prevent future conflict by establishing the conditions for a fair election campaign and transparent polls. The sooner this is achieved, the more difficult it would be for the defeated candidate to challenge the election results and to seek a trial of strength outside of the democratic framework. All in all, the tighter the election outcomes, the greater the conflict potential. A change of power would result in a particularly unpredictable situation. At present, there is a strong case for the election victory of incumbent Ouattara on 25 October 2015, which is widely expected by many Ivorians and international observers. In this scenario, a new escalation similar to the conflict in 2010/2011 is considered unlikely. Even though tensions and sporadic incidents cannot be ruled out, the unique military and political balance of power in the country render a wide-ranging violent confrontation improbable. In this case, the decisive test for the capacity of Ivorian democracy would be postponed to 2020, and the expected power struggle over the succession of Ouattara.

Ultimately, the question of whether Ivory Coast has really overcome its long crisis will remain interesting beyond the vote in October 2015. The fact that the dividing lines outside of politics are much weaker today than they were five years ago certainly constitutes a positive development. Regardless of their political orientation, the majority of Ivorians have come to believe that a crisis like the one following the 2010 presidential elections, which set the country back by several years, must not be repeated under any circumstances. A new awareness of the presence of an overriding, national interest appears to be taking shape among the Ivorian population, which holds precedence over individual political preferences and party leaders' lust for power. This change in mentality would indeed be an invaluable asset to the process of democratic consolidation.