



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Warning: Côte d'Ivoire **October 2020**

Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Warning for Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire's political climate has been toxic for decades. In 1995, President Henri Konan Bédié, an ethnic Baoulé and leader of the *Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), coined the term '[ivoirité](#)' to divide 'true' Ivoirians belonging to southern (mostly Akan) ethnic groups against people from northern groups belonging to Mandé, Senoufo, Voltaic (Gur), and Bambara ethnicities. Many northerners emigrated to Côte d'Ivoire as laborers during French colonial rule and the presidency of Félix Houphouët-Boigny. They often work on plantations owned by members of southern groups.

The strategy was aimed at excluding Muslims of these northern groups from political power, especially Alassane Ouattara, who was falsely accused of being born in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso.) The military dictator Robert Guéï, himself a Mandé, even enshrined this exclusion in the [2000 Constitution](#), requiring presidential candidates to have both Ivoirian mothers and fathers.

Laurent Gbagbo, a southwestern ethnic Bété and leader of the *Ivoirian Popular Front* (FPI), refused to accept his defeat in the 2010 election by Muslim northerner Alassane Ouattara, leader of the *Rally of the Republicans* (RDR). Gbagbo supporters, who included [security forces and militias](#), used state media to [incite violence](#) against Ouattara sympathisers. Armed groups on both sides targeted civilians. Ethnic violence killed [3,000](#) people in five months. Muslims were targeted. Pro-Gbagbo mobs [burned northerners and West African immigrants alive](#). Gbagbo was arrested and tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity.

President Ouattara has since restored stability and has sought to unite the country. In 2013, parliament [relaxed the requirements](#) to acquire nationality. The new 2016 Constitution, accepted by referendum, only requires presidential candidates to have one Ivoirian parent. While this aimed to [put an end to 'ivoirité'](#), tensions persist, and minority groups like the nomadic Fula are [not recognized as citizens](#).

A flawed transitional justice process has hindered reconciliation. Accused [human rights violators](#) from the *Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire* (FRCI), loyal to Ouattara, have not been brought to justice for the massacre of over 800 people in Duékoué in 2011. Some hold senior roles in the security forces. [Government critics](#) have been arrested, [raising tensions](#) between groups. An Abidjan court [acquitted](#) Gbagbo's wife, Simone Gbagbo, of war crimes charges in 2017, and Ouattara granted her [amnesty](#) in 2018. The ICC [dropped](#) charges against Laurent Gbagbo in 2019, granting him conditional release. Many of Gbagbo's victims remain traumatized.

President Ouattara announced that he would step down after two terms, in accordance with term limits in the Constitution. However, the death of Ouattara's chosen successor, Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, led Ouattara to run for re-election. This reversal of Ouattara's pledge to step down has sparked [violent protests](#).

Gbagbo and former northern leader Guillaume Soro have been barred from running for President. The FPI has chosen Gbagbo's former Prime Minister Pascal Affi N'Guessan as their leader, and the Constitutional Council [approved only four out of 44 candidates](#) - Bédié, Nguessan, Ouattara, and independent candidate Kouadio Konan Bertin. On October 18, the opposition [called for an election boycott](#). In Bongouanou, N'Guessan's stronghold, ethnic Agni [started violent clashes](#) with pro-Ouattara Dioula, who burned N'Guessan's house.

Genocide Watch considers Côte d'Ivoire to be at Stage 6, Polarization.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- All presidential candidates should pledge that they will abide by the results of the coming election.
- The Côte d'Ivoire government must protect *all* civilians from electoral and post-electoral violence.
- Election observers from the AU, EU, UN, and NGO's should have free access to monitor the election.
- The U.N., African Union, and France should prepare to send peacekeepers if Côte Ivoire explodes.