



AFRICAN NARRATIVES

2025 Ivorian Presidential Elections: Between a Resurgence of Crisis and an Opportunity for Change



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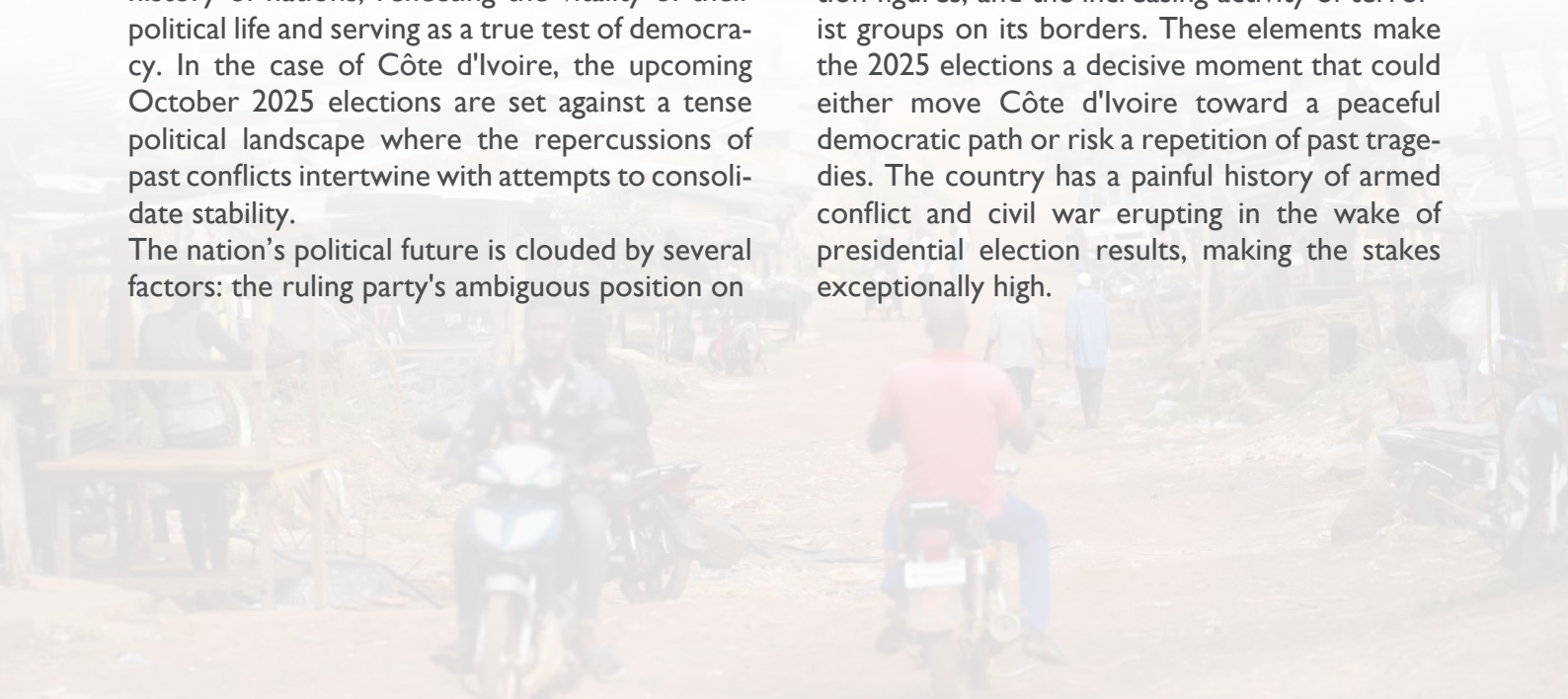


Introduction

Presidential elections are pivotal moments in the history of nations, reflecting the vitality of their political life and serving as a true test of democracy. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the upcoming October 2025 elections are set against a tense political landscape where the repercussions of past conflicts intertwine with attempts to consolidate stability.

The nation's political future is clouded by several factors: the ruling party's ambiguous position on

its candidate, the exclusion of prominent opposition figures, and the increasing activity of terrorist groups on its borders. These elements make the 2025 elections a decisive moment that could either move Côte d'Ivoire toward a peaceful democratic path or risk a repetition of past tragedies. The country has a painful history of armed conflict and civil war erupting in the wake of presidential election results, making the stakes exceptionally high.



Executive Summary

This research paper examines the presidential elections scheduled for October 2025 in Côte d'Ivoire, focusing on the most significant challenges facing the electoral process. It highlights the country's violent electoral history, which culminated in the post-election crises of 2000 and 2010.

The analysis delves into the complexities of the current political landscape, including:

- The exclusion of prominent opposition candidates like Tidjane Thiam and former President Laurent Gbagbo.
- The opposition's response in forming a political alliance and the ruling party's subsequent call

for dialogue on electoral reforms.

- The security threats posed by terrorist groups active in neighboring countries.
- The constitutional controversy surrounding the possibility of current President Alassane Ouattara running for a fourth term.

The paper concludes by presenting four possible scenarios for the elections, ranging from political escalation and unrest to de-escalation through dialogue and consensus.

Keywords

Electoral violence, 2025 Ivorian elections, Coalition for Peaceful Alternation, democracy in West Africa.





First: Presidential Elections as a Determinant of Political Stability

Presidential elections are fundamental to the legitimacy of any political system, ensuring the peaceful and democratic transfer of power. In Côte d'Ivoire, however, this process has historically been a catalyst for instability.

The country has a history fraught with electoral violence. The 2010 presidential election, contested by Laurent Gbagbo and the eventual winner Alassane Ouattara, plunged Côte d'Ivoire into one of the most severe political crises in its modern history. Gbagbo's refusal to recognize the results triggered what is now known as the Second Ivorian Civil War, a conflict that claimed approximately 3,000 lives.

This was not an isolated incident. The 2000

dential election, won by Laurent Gbagbo, also led to a violent armed conflict after Robert Gueï, head of the ruling military junta, rejected the outcome. The ensuing First Ivorian Civil War (2002–2007) devastated the country, causing widespread political and economic instability and resulting in hundreds of casualties.

This history underscores a dangerous pattern: elections intended to enhance stability have instead become flashpoints for violence. For over a decade (2000–2011), two consecutive presidential elections resulted in civil wars, confirming that the electoral process in Côte d'Ivoire can threaten the very fabric of its political and economic stability.

¹ Joseph Siegle, Hany Wahila, Côte d'Ivoire: Efforts to Forge Resiliency Face Stiff Test, Africa Center For Strategic Study, Acquired on 12 June 2025.
<https://shorturl.at/IqkCD>

Second : The Ivorian Political Scene Ahead of the October 2025 Elections

The political landscape in Côte d'Ivoire is currently defined by turmoil and uncertainty, creating conditions ripe for conflict. This volatility is driven by several key factors:

• Exclusion of Prominent Opposition Candidates

The Independent Electoral Commission recently disqualified four opposition candidates, rendering them ineligible to run. The most prominent among them was Tidjane Thiam of the Democratic Party (PDCI), who was widely seen as the strongest potential challenger to President Ouattara. Thiam was disqualified in April 2025 on the grounds that he held dual French-Ivorian citizenship at the time of his official registration, despite having since renounced his French citizenship. Thiam's lawyer has filed a complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Committee, arguing the decision is a serious violation of Côte d'Ivoire's international obligations.

Three other major political figures were also excluded:

- **Laurent Gbagbo**, former president, and his close ally Charles Blé Goudé, due to past convictions related to the 2010-2011 post-election crisis.

- **Guillaume Soro**, former prime minister, due to an in-absentia life sentence for an alleged 2021 coup attempt.

In response, the opposition has formed the Coalition for Peaceful Alternation (CAP-CI), which includes Thiam's PDCI and Simone Gbagbo's Capable Generations Movement (MGC). The coalition has criticized the electoral commission's decisions as biased and accused the judiciary of being used as a tool for political exclusion. These actions have intensified tensions and raised the likelihood of a repeat of past electoral violence.

• Ambiguity of the Ruling Party and Constitutional Controversy

The disqualifications have left the opposition with a limited field of candidates, including Simone Gbagbo, former first lady; Jean-Louis Billon, the new candidate for the Democratic Party; and Pascal Affi N'Guessan, the candidate for the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI).

Adding to the uncertainty, the ruling party, the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP), has not yet named its candidate. A significant point of contention is whether President Alassane Ouattara will seek a fourth term. Article 56 of the Ivorian constitution limits a president to two five-year terms.

2 ALJAZEERA, Key Ivory Coast opposition figures banned from October presidential vote, accepted on 12 June 2025. <https://shorturl.at/KUSIJ>

3 Thomas Mackintosh, Main opposition leader removed from Ivory Coast electoral list, BBC, Accessed on 12 June 2025. <https://shorturl.at/I5VoJ>

4 Reuters, Ivory Coast's final electoral list excludes opposition leader Thiam, accepted on 12 June 2025. <https://shorturl.at/vRa82>

5 Africa News, Ivory Coast opposition call for election reform ahead of vote, accepted on 12 June 2025. <https://shorturl.at/XUBrj>

6 Africa news, Ivory Coast: Parties begin preps for 2025 presidential election, accepted on 13 June 2025. <https://shorturl.at/Oy3MY>

7 Joseph Siegle, Hany Wahila, Côte d'Ivoire: Efforts to Forge Resiliency Face Stiff Test, Ibid, accepted on June 13, 2025.

In addition to the emergence of some prominent political figures who announced their intention to run in the upcoming elections, such as former Minister of Trade Jean-Louis Billon, who announced his intention to run as a representative of the Democratic Party, following the decision to exclude Tidjane Thiam. In addition to the announcement of the Ivorian Popular Front Party(FPI)On the candidacy of Pascal Affi N'Guesan, the former Ivorian Prime Minister, who ran against Ouattara in the 2015 and 2020 elections. What adds to the ambiguity of the situation is the fact that the ruling party has not yet decided on its position regarding nominating a candidate to represent it in the upcoming elections. The current president, Alassane Ouattara, is supposed to be unable to run for a fourth term under the Ivorian constitution, as Article 56 of the Ivorian constitution stipulates that the president of the republic is elected by direct universal suffrage for a term of five years, and can only be re-elected once. Although the constitution explicitly states that every president has the right to hold the presidency for only two presidential terms, Ouattara and his ruling party interpret the text of the constitution amended in 2016 to mean that Ouattara's next term is the first under the Third Republic governed by the 2016 constitution. With this interpretation, Hassan Ouattara was able to run in the 2020 elections, and they can even apply the same interpretation in the next elections so that Ouattara remains in

power until 2030. In doing so, they raise controversy about the interpretation of the constitution, and they are adapting the constitution and its interpretation in order to continue to dominate the government. This had negative repercussions for Côte d'Ivoire in the 2020 elections, which were boycotted by the opposition. If the same interpretation is applied to the upcoming elections, it could lead to unrest and violent protests by the opposition, threatening the security and stability of Côte d'Ivoire.

If Ouattara does not run in these elections, since his candidacy requires amending the constitution, the Rally of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) party will nominate other candidates, such as Ibrahima Cisse-Bakengo, governor of the Abidjan region, or Adama Bictogo, president of the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire. The party is scheduled to hold a meeting on June 21 and 22 to decide on the candidate to represent the party in the upcoming elections. .

This constitutional maneuvering, which the opposition boycotted in 2020, is a major source of political tension. If Ouattara does not run, the RHDP may nominate other prominent figures, such as Ibrahima Cissé-Bakongo, governor of the Abidjan region, or Adama Bictogo, president of the National Assembly. The party is expected to announce its decision at a meeting on June 21-22. This ambiguity places Côte d'Ivoire at a critical crossroads, where it must choose between a path of dialogue or a new political crisis.

8 TRT GLOBAL, Côte d'Ivoire's ex-minister Billon seeks to lead opposition in October election, Accessed on 13 June 2025.
<https://shorturl.at/xnXpX>

9 Africa news,Ivory Coast: Parties begin preps for 2025 presidential election, accepted on 13 June 2025.
<https://shorturl.at/Oy3MY>

10 Constitution of Côte d'Ivoire amended in 2016.
<https://shorturl.at/2G3r9>

11 PSC Report,Côte d'Ivoire and the 'third-term' virus, Accessed on 13 June 2025.
<https://shorturl.at/u8tRJ>

12 Reuters, Ivory Coast's final electoral list excludes opposition leader Thiam, Ibid Accessed on 13 June 2025.
Joseph Siegle, Hany Wahila,Côte d'Ivoire: Efforts to Forge Resiliency Face Stiff Test, Ibid, Accessed on June 13, 2025

Third: Key Challenges Facing the 2025 Elections

The upcoming elections present an opportunity to foster stability, but they are shadowed by fundamental challenges that threaten the integrity and transparency of the process.

Security Threats and Regional Terrorism

Côte d'Ivoire is situated in a volatile region. Terrorist groups, particularly the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), are highly active in neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso. According to reports, the Sahel region accounted for approximately 19% of all terrorist attacks worldwide in recent years. JNIM alone claimed over 240 attacks between January and May 2025, double the number from the same period in 2024.

These threats have already spilled over into coastal West African states, including Côte d'Ivoire. The presence of these groups poses a grave threat to the electoral process, as they could disrupt voting, intimidate citizens, and destabilize border regions.

• The Constitutional Controversy and Ouattara's Potential Fourth Term

President Ouattara has hinted at a desire to run again, stating, "I am in good health and excited to continue serving my country." If the RHDP officially nominates him, it would reignite the 2020 crisis over the interpretation of presidential term limits. This move would likely be met with

widespread protests from an opposition already angered by the exclusion of its key candidates. Such a scenario risks creating a crisis of legitimacy and plunging the country into violent conflict, undermining any prospect of a peaceful transfer of power.

• Eroding Trust in Electoral Integrity

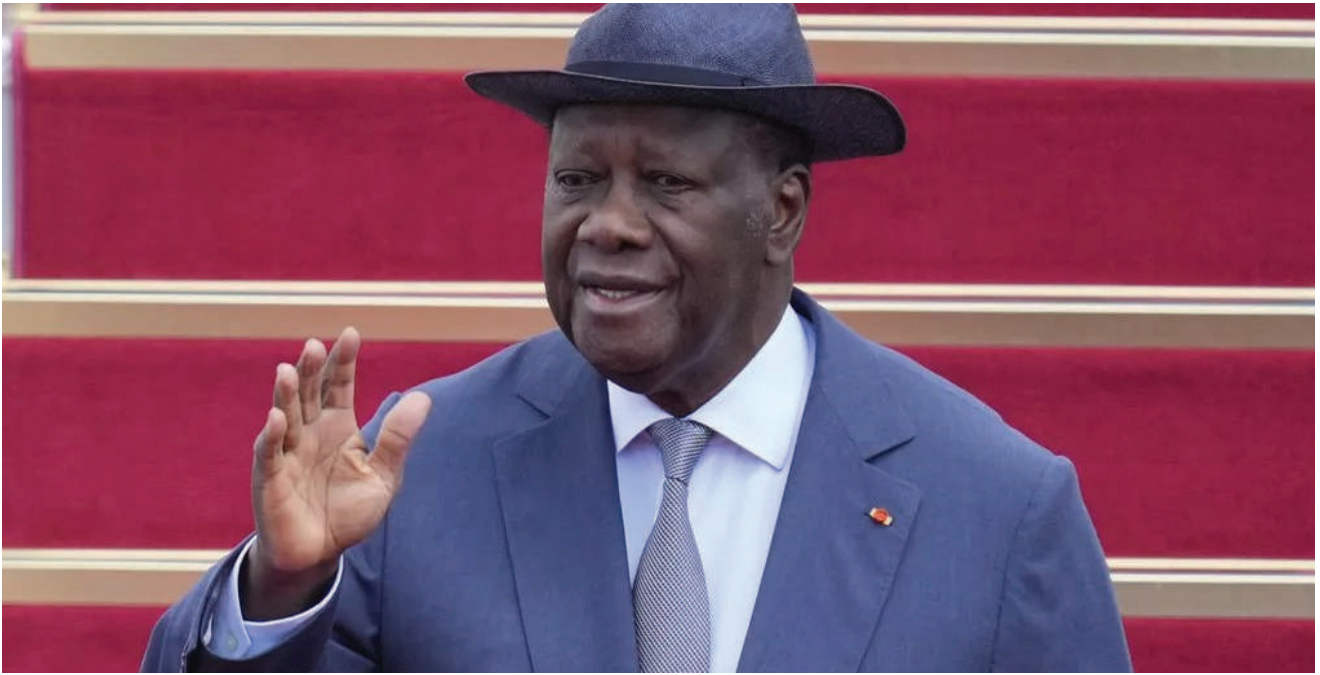
The electoral commission's disqualification of opposition candidates has severely damaged its credibility. Supporters of Tidjane Thiam view his exclusion as a political maneuver by the ruling regime to eliminate its strongest rival. The CAP-CI coalition has echoed these sentiments, accusing the commission of bias. This deep-seated distrust in the electoral process is dangerous in a country with a history of post-election civil wars. If a significant portion of the population believes the election is rigged, the potential for violent rejection of the results is high.



13 Priyanka Sippy, This will be available on a group of leading DJs from Africa, BBC Afrique, arriving on 14 June. <https://shorturl.at/nc7ha>

14 Reuters, Ivory Coast president signals he would like to run for fourth term, Accessed on 14 June 2025 <https://shorturl.at/CaB1T>

15 France 24, Ivory Coast opposition calls marches against leader's eviction from electoral race, accepted on 15 June 2025. <https://shorturl.at/0m6MO>



Fourth: Future Scenarios for the Presidential Elections

The current political climate suggests four possible scenarios for the 2025 presidential elections:

Scenario 1: President Ouattara Runs for a Fourth Term

Given the RHDP's support and Ouattara's own statements, his candidacy is a strong possibility. This would be achieved by again applying the controversial interpretation of the 2016 constitution. This path is fraught with risk, as it would likely trigger a massive backlash from an opposition that feels systematically excluded, potentially leading to widespread unrest and violent conflict.

Scenario 2: The RHDP Nominates an Alternative Candidate

To de-escalate tensions, the RHDP might choose to nominate a different candidate, such as Ibrahim Cissé-Bakongo or Adama Bictogo. This would sidestep the constitutional controversy surrounding Ouattara and could be seen as a conciliatory gesture toward the opposition, potentially reducing the risk of conflict.

16 Reuters, Ivory Coast president Ouattara's party pushes him to run again, arriving on 6/15/2025.
<https://shorturl.at/MRrkL>

17 Africa News, Ivory Coast's Ouattara hints at fourth term bid, accepted on 15/6/2025.
<https://shorturl.at/kSN4C>

Scenario 3: The Exclusion Decisions Are Reviewed

The opposition continues to demand a review of the candidate disqualifications. However, this scenario appears unlikely. The head of the electoral commission has cited the tight timeline before the October election as a barrier to revisiting the decisions. Furthermore, Laurent Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé would require a presidential pardon to be eligible, which has not been granted. While possible, there are no current indications that this outcome will materialize.

Scenario 4: The Opposition Unites Behind a Single Candidate

The formation of the CAP-CI coalition created a platform for unified opposition action. With several of its leaders now excluded, the coalition could consolidate its efforts behind a single consensus candidate, such as Simone Gbagbo, Jean-Louis Billon, or Pascal Affi N'Guessan. A united front would create a formidable voting bloc and pose a significant challenge to the ruling party. While the opposition has not yet announced such a consensus, it remains a realistic and strategic possibility.

18 Joseph Siegle, Hany Wahila, Côte d'Ivoire: Efforts to Forge Resiliency Face Stiff Test, Ibid, Accessed on June 15, 2025



Conclusion

Côte d'Ivoire stands at a fateful crossroads that will determine its political future for years to come. It faces a stark choice: either organize fair and inclusive elections that enhance stability and restore confidence in its democratic institutions, or fall back into a spiral of violence fueled by political exclusion and disputes over legitimacy.

The outcome will depend on the ability of the nation's political forces to prioritize the national interest over partisan gain. Dialogue and consen-

sus represent the only viable path to navigate this critical moment with minimal cost, ensuring a peaceful future for one of West Africa's most important nations.