

THE 2020 IVORIAN ELECTION AND THE ‘THIRD-TERM’ DEBATE: A CRISIS OF ‘KOROCRACY’?

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In 2020, Côte d’Ivoire was supposed to turn an important page in its history. Ten years after the end of the war, peace and growth had returned to the country. On 5 March, in Yamoussoukro, Alassane Dramane Ouattara (popularly known as ADO) officially declared that he would not run for another term and would instead ‘make way for a new generation’.¹ This decision seemed to cement prospects for post-conflict democratic consolidation at a time when many African countries, especially neighbouring Guinea, were facing serious tensions over the issue of third presidential terms. But the death on 8 July of Amadou Gon Coulibaly, the prime minister and Ouattara’s chosen successor, upended this scenario of generational change. Citing force majeure, Ouattara reneged on his commitment and joined the electoral fray. On 3 November, the Electoral Commission announced his re-election for a third term with 94.27 percent of the vote, a victory confirmed by the Constitutional Council a few days later against a backdrop of widespread violence. In the meantime, opposition leaders, who had called for an ‘active boycott’ of the election and attempted to set up an alternative government, had been thrown into prison, placed under house arrest, or forced into exile. In total, 85 civilians had officially been

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1. The full text of Alassane Ouattara’s speech is available at <<https://news.abidjan.net/h/670027.html>> (25 September 2020).

killed and nearly 500 wounded in the election clashes,² and more than 8,000 people had fled the country.³

Far from turning the page on past violence, this episode seems to have plunged Côte d'Ivoire into a repeat of history. As well as echoing the post-electoral war of 2010–2011⁴ and the earlier violence over *ivoirité* that led to the *Forces Nouvelles* rebellion in 2002, it rehashes an old story of personal and partisan rivalries between Ouattara (age 78 years) and former Presidents Henri Konan Bédié (age 86 years) and Laurent Gbagbo (age 75 years), who have been competing for power since President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's death in 1993. There is in fact a stark contrast between the profound sociological changes the country has seen since the beginning of the armed crisis, with the emergence of new generations of militants and fighters, and the perpetuation of this triangular rivalry between the three old leaders who maintain a firm grip on the political system, testifying to the reproduction of a gerontocratic order—or 'Korocracy' in Nouchi, the Ivorian slang⁵—in a post-conflict Ivorian society.

This briefing shows that the current electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is not just an institutional conflict over a third presidential term, as may be the case in other countries on the continent. The crisis exposes the frailties of a post-conflict reconstruction process that took shape in the hegemonic mode of a monopolization of political and economic positions of power by the victors of the war. Some articles have analysed the Ivorian peace-building process from a 'victor's peace' perspective, bringing into light the political, military, and judiciary biases of Ouattara's government.⁶ This briefing goes beyond this winner-takes-all argument, mainly focused on coalition bargains and the repression (or co-optation) of the vanquished, to stress the structural features of the new post-conflict power relations, in particular generational and class cleavages. We argue that the 2020 electoral crisis reflects a rupture in the system of privilege distribution that underpinned the Ouattara regime's stability. It reveals the

2. According to the government spokesperson: Wassimagnon, 'Côte d'Ivoire: affrontements interpolitiques, le gouvernement annonce 85 morts, 484 blessés, 225 personnes interpellées, 167 inculpées, 45 sous mandat de dépôt', *Koaci*, 11 November 2020, <https://www.koaci.com/article/2020/11/11/cote-divoire/politique/cote-divoire-affrontements-interpolitiques-le-gouvernement-annonce-85-morts-484-blesses-225-personnes-interpellees-167-inculpees-45-sous-mandat-de-depot_146597.html> (12 November 2020).

3. According to the HCR spokesperson: 'UNHCR expands aid as Ivorian refugee numbers top 8000', 10 November 2020, <<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/11/5faa5ac74/unhcr-expands-aid-ivorian-refugee-numbers-top-8000.html>> (24 February 2021).

4. See Richard Banégas, 'Post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire: The gbonhi war', *African Affairs* 110, 440 (2011), pp. 457–468 and Scott Strauss, 'It's sheer horror here: Patterns of violence during the first four months of Côte d'Ivoire's post-electoral crisis', *African Affairs* 110, 440 (2011), pp. 481–489.

5. 'Koro' comes from the Dyula and means 'elder'. The term expresses a mark of respect linked to relationships of social seniority and not only biological seniority.

6. See, for example, Giulia Piccolino, 'Peacebuilding and statebuilding in post-2011 Côte d'Ivoire: A victor's peace?', *African Affairs* 117, 468 (2018), pp. 485–508.

contradictions of a class process that contributed to the establishment of a new state bourgeoisie and blocked the ambition of the emerging generations. Fundamentally, the briefing suggests that this third-term conflict manifests a crisis of 'Korocracy' in the political sphere and the security sector (SSR), both of which are marked by increasingly tense patron–client relations between '*vieux pères*' (old fathers) and '*bons petits*' (good kids). In conclusion, we suggest that these generational contradictions raise questions about the longer-term sustainability of a post-conflict regime which, behind a smokescreen of 'reconciliation', is intensifying its authoritarian turn. This briefing is based on ethnographic observations and interviews with members of the post-conflict coalition and the opposition, collected over several long research periods, including the last one between July 2020 and January 2021. It relies on a long experience of field research 'from below' in Ivorian politics, shared by both the authors.⁷

The third-term crisis, electoral violence, and the failure of civil disobedience

The run-up to the 2020 elections saw tensions steadily rising across the country. The opposition and civil society organizations contested the government's stranglehold on the composition of the supposedly 'independent' Electoral Commission and of the Constitutional Council responsible for validating the results. The arrangements for the revision of the electoral roll, the issuing of voter cards, and the revision of the electoral code also raised major concerns about the fairness of the election. In March, civil society organizations took to the streets to demand that the constitution be respected. They met with a repressive response from the government and arrests were made. On 6 August 2020, the announcement of Ouattara's candidacy fanned the flames of protest. Violence broke out in the opposition strongholds (Douakro, Divo, Bonoua, and Yopougon) to oppose a third, arguably unconstitutional⁸ presidential term, causing about 15 deaths. These demonstrations, which were not authorized under the pretext of the COVID-19 health emergency, were again violently repressed

7. Richard Banégas started his first research project on youth, citizenship, and violence in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2000, carrying out one or more field surveys each year during the last 20 years. His last research programme on technologies of identification, and the struggle for citizenship will soon be published in a forthcoming book (co-authored with Armando Cutolo). Camille Popineau started her research on the Forces nouvelles' rebellion in Bouaké in 2016. Since then, she has spent 15 months in field research, carrying out 245 interviews with (ex)-combatants, military commanders, political leaders, civil servants, and members of civil society. Her PhD thesis on rebellion and state formation in Côte d'Ivoire will be defended in 2021 at University Paris 1 Sorbonne.

8. It should be noted here that the government claims that the new constitution voted in 2016 turned the institutional clock back and reset the counters to zero for the number of presidential terms (two). But several provisions of the new constitution (including Article 193, which stipulates continuity between the two charters) are at odds with this argument.

and many activists were arrested, including civil society figure Pulcherie Gbalet.⁹

On 15 September, the Constitutional Council's disqualification of 40 out of 44 candidates radicalized the situation and further united the opposition against the incumbent president. In addition to major figures such as Laurent Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro, former president of the national assembly, who were barred from running for legal reasons,¹⁰ a number of serious candidates were rejected, prompting widespread disapproval. Even the African Commission on Human Rights took a stand against the exclusion of Gbagbo and Soro, to no effect.¹¹ From his comfortable exile in France, Soro, the former rebel leader, urged a common front against the 'constitutional coup d'état'.¹² More significantly, Henri Konan Bédié (*Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire*, PDCI) and Pascal Affi N'Guessan (*Front populaire Ivoirien*, FPI), whose candidacies had been validated, joined forces with other opposition movements to call for an 'active boycott' and civil disobedience. This marked a major turning point in the crisis.

Previously, it had been unthinkable that Bédié and his party of notables would engage in street politics, a mode of action favoured instead by the FPI and the pro-Gbagbo trade unions. Now, however, the PDCI activists were at the heart of the resistance, especially in the Baoulé region. FPI activists appeared to be keeping a lower profile. The geography of the pre- and post-electoral violence bears out their limited presence in the anti-third-term protests, with clashes mainly affecting the PDCI strongholds. No doubt the internal rift in the FPI between Affi N'Guessan and the pro-Gbagbo wing played a part in this weak mobilization, as did the attitude of Gbagbo himself who, on 29 October, broke his silence to call for dialogue.¹³

9. See Amnesty International, 'Côte d'Ivoire. Les violences et la répression des voix dissidentes augmentent à l'approche de l'élection présidentielle', 28 August 2020, <<https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2020/08/cote-divoire-les-violences-des-voix-dissidentes-augmentent-a-lapproche-de-lelection/>> (30 August 2020).

10. Due to their judiciary background, Laurent Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro have been stripped of their civic rights and struck off the electoral rolls. These court decisions have officially been confirmed in July 2020, offering the Constitutional Council a legal argument for their disqualification in the presidential election.

11. *Le Monde*, 'Côte d'Ivoire: la Cour africaine ordonne la réintégration de Laurent Gbagbo sur la liste électorale', 25 September 2020, <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/09/25/cote-d-ivoire-la-cour-de-justice-africaine-recuse-l-exclusion-de-laurent-gbagbo-de-la-presidentielle_6053664_3212.html> (24 February 2021); *France 24*, 'La Cour africaine demande le retour de Guillaume Soro dans la course à la présidentielle ivoirienne', 15 September 2020, <<https://www.france24.com/fr/20200915-la-cour-africaine-demande-le-retour-de-guillaume-soro-dans-la-course-a-la-presidentielle-ivoirienne>> (26 February 2021).

12. *Abidjan.net*, 'Présidentielles 2020: Guillaume Soro conteste le rejet de sa candidature par le Conseil constitutionnel (déclaration)', 15 September 2020, <<https://news.abidjan.net/h/679920.html>> (24 February 2021).

13. See Cyril Bensimon, 'En Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo rompt dix ans de silence à la

The active boycott did not elicit the mass movement that the opposition had hoped for. The spectre of the post-election war of 2010–2011 doubtlessly discouraged many Ivorians from mobilizing. This fear has been reinforced by the ban on protests due to the COVID-19 state of emergency. The government had also made many preventive arrests of opponents and succeeded in rallying the support of a number of pro-Soro leaders. Finally, the position of Bédié and Affi Nguessan, who called for a boycott without withdrawing from the electoral process, did not make for a clear and coherent opposition strategy. The new generations and a large part of the middle classes seemed disinclined to sacrifice their future for the sake of the recurrent struggle between the old 'koro' of the Ivorian political scene.

Civil disobedience nonetheless resulted in many casualties before, during, and after the elections—about 15 on polling day and nearly 100 in total.¹⁴ Given the boycott, Ouattara's victory was not in doubt. Instead, the key issue was voter turnout. Observation of the election showed a citizenry split into two, with the President's supporters flocking to vote, while in opposition strongholds, polling stations were deserted, blocked, or ransacked. In some cases, staff had to flee with ballot boxes under their arms to escape mob justice.¹⁵ As we directly observed in Abidjan and Bouaké, the geography of the vote and of the boycott also reflected this partisan and communal division of urban areas. Officially, 4,780 polling stations were unable to open on 31 October (about 20 percent of the electorate). Despite this, the Election Commission established turnout at a highly unlikely 53.9 percent.¹⁶

Declaring that they no longer recognized Alassane Ouattara as head of state, on 2 November, the opposition leaders attempted to set up a parallel government in the form of a National Transition Committee (CNT), with Bédié as president and Affi N'Guessan as spokesman.¹⁷ This strategy

veille de la présidentielle', *Le Monde*, 29 October 2020, <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/10/29/en-cote-d-ivoire-laurent-gbagbo-rompt-dix-ans-de-silence-a-la-veille-de-la-presidentielle_6057805_3212.html> (11 October 2020).

14. See Amnesty International, 'Côte d'Ivoire: The use of machetes and guns reveals horrors of post-election violence', 16 November 2020, <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/cote-divoire-use-of-machetes-and-guns-reveals-horrors/>> (27 November 2020).

15. See Cyril Bensimon, Youenn Gourlay and Yassin Ciyow, "'A chaque élection, ce sont des problèmes, il faut que nos vieux grandissent": en Côte d'Ivoire, une journée de vote sous tension', *Le Monde*, 1 November 2020, <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/11/01/a-chaque-election-ce-sont-des-problemes-il-faut-que-nos-vieux-grandissent-en-cote-d-ivoire-une-journee-de-vote-sous-tension_6058073_3212.html> (24 February 2021).

16. *C9info*, 'Présidentielles 2020. Proclamation solennelle des résultats provisoires du scrutin du 31 octobre 2020', 3 November 2020, <<https://www.c9info.com/presidentielle-2020-proclamation-solennelle-des-resultats-provisoires-du-scrutin-du-31-octobre-2020/>> (24 February 2021).

17. Benjamin Roger, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Pascal Affi N'Guessan, la naissance d'un opposant', *Jeune Afrique*, 9 November 2020, <<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1071762/politique/cote-divoire-pascal-affi-nguessan-la-naissance-dun-opposant/>> (24 February 2021).

was inspired by the situation of two-headed government that had prevailed between December 2010 and April 2011, when Ouattara and his allies contested Gbagbo's presidency from the plush lounges of the Hotel du Golf. Except that back then, the 'République du Golf' had a rebel army to rely on and it eventually prevailed, with crucial international support.¹⁸ For want of similar means, this 2020 attempt was quickly stifled: on 3 November, the government charged the opposition leaders with acts of 'sedition', constituting an 'attack on and conspiracy against the authority of the state'.¹⁹ Their homes were surrounded by police, and around 15 of Bédié's close associates and senior PDCI officials were arrested, while the former president was placed under house arrest. Albert Mabri Toikeusse (UDPCI) and Affi N'Guessan managed to escape until, three days later, the FPI president was arrested by one of the regime's elite units and detained.

As soon as the Constitutional Council announced the election results, the UN, ECOWAS and the African Union—which on 4 November had already invited the opposition to reconsider its decision to form the CNT out of respect for constitutional order—hastened to congratulate the president for his re-election. So did China and France which, in the words of its ambassador, considered it was now time to 'move forward'.²⁰ Emmanuel Macron even wrote his 'dear Alassane' a warm message encouraging dialogue, less than two days after the deadly clashes in M'Batto and Daoukro.²¹ Between international recognition and promises of reconciliation, life seemed to be returning to normal in Côte d'Ivoire, with everyone going back to their business. Yet this apparent normalization masked great uncertainties for the country's future. The following sections assess these uncertainties and shed light on three crucial aspects of the current crisis: the breakdown of the pro-Ouattara partisan coalition, the regime's political economy, and the fragmentation of its security system.

Post-conflict hegemony: The erosion of Ouattara's party coalition

To grasp the reasons behind the electoral crisis, it is essential to understand how the Ouattara regime ensured its post-war stability and to recognize the intrinsic fragility of a post-conflict reconstruction carried out through

18. See Moussa Fofana, 'Des Forces nouvelles aux Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire. Comment une rébellion devient républicaine', *Politique africaine* 122, 2 (2011), pp. 161–178.

19. See RFI, 'Côte d'Ivoire: pour le RHDP, l'opposition a commis un acte insurrectionnel', 4 November 2020, <<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20201104-cote-d-ivoire-le-rhdp-l-opposition-a-commis-actes-insurrectionnels>> (4 November 2020).

20. See *Agence ivoirienne de presse*, 'Situation en Côte d'Ivoire: la France estime qu'il faut "aller de l'avant" après la présidentielle (Ambassadeur)', 7 November 2020, <<https://news.abidjan.net/h/683301.html>> (9 November 2020).

21. Emmanuel Macron's letter leaked quickly. It has been received by the authors through private channels and published in some Ivorian media: *La vraie Info*, 'Voici l'intégralité de la lettre de Macron à Ouattara', undated, <<https://lavraieinfo.com/international/voici-lintegralite-de-la-lettre-de-macron-a-ouattara/>> (24 February 2021).

a hegemonic 'winner-takes-all' approach. This hegemony was based, in the first place, on the formation of a new political and social coalition that continued to expand its control until it broke down in 2018–2019. ADO was brought to power by three distinct networks of actors—from within the *Rassemblement des républicains* (RDR), the *Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), and the *Forces nouvelles* (FN) rebellion—who took control of the state. The *Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et pour la paix* (RHDP), created in 2005 in opposition to Gbagbo, provided the legal framework for this political union of convenience (which expanded to include other small parties, notably Mabri Toikeusse's UDPCI). The inter-party coalition garnered broad support for Ouattara's candidacy in the 2010 elections and was an asset coming out of the war as it enlarged his sociological base. The alliance between the RDR and the PDCI offered the new regime a foothold in two distinct social categories and two regions: first, the Akan landowners and notability in the South-East, and second, the Malinke and Senufo networks from the North, with their powerful notables and their omnipresence in key sectors of the economy such as trade and transport. The RHDP thus renewed the historical compromise of the Houphouët-Boigny regime, which, starting with the creation of the PDCI-RDA in 1946, had allied the Akan bourgeoisie (particularly the Baoulé planters) and the Northern 'big men', until the alliance broke up in 1994 and dissidents from the PDCI created the RDR. The 2020 crisis shows that this renewed compromise has collapsed, with violence in the PDCI strongholds between the Akan and Dyula communities rekindling tensions around *ivoirité*.²²

The old Houphouëtist axis was not reconstituted identically; however, it was complexified by the integration of a third group, the former rebel forces, whose presence within the state proved crucial to the post-conflict consolidation of power. The new President's debt to former rebel leader Guillaume Soro and other warlords made this alliance politically necessary. By granting them powerful leadership positions, Ouattara not only secured the loyalty of the former rebels and his foothold in the north of the country. Above all, it allowed the inclusion of part of the new generation of FN militants and fighters, much younger than the Bédié-ADO-Gbagbo generation, made up of non-commissioned officers and union leaders born in the 1970s and 1980s. As the embodiment of this new generation, Soro was appointed prime minister and then president of the National Assembly in 2012, becoming constitutionally the second-ranking figure in the Ivorian state, while most of the former rebel commanders (or ex-comzones) obtained command posts in the new army or were appointed as prefects.

22. It could be argued that this compromise was never really sealed at the local level, as suggested, for example, by the violence that broke out in Béoumi in May 2019 between the Baoulé and Malinké populations.

The former rebels of the civil–political branch were similarly included at the intermediate levels of the public administration. With these three political blocs (RDR, PDCI and FN) united within the RHDP and the Gbagbo camp violently sidelined and repressed, the Ouattara regime secured a hegemonic position that, in principle, guaranteed it a fairly solid social, political, and economic base.

But this broad coalition did not weather well, unravelling progressively until its final, violent break-up in 2020. First, the representatives of the two main groups allied to the RDR left the RHDP: in August 2018, Bédié and most of the PDCI walked out on the presidential party, believing that their support for Ouattara should have led to a PDCI candidate for the presidency. In February 2019, Guillaume Soro was forced to resign as president of the National Assembly and go into exile under threat of prosecution. The reasons for this double fracture are certainly manifold: it is linked to the various interlocking systems of privilege that Ouattara put in place both to favour people from the North and also to maintain a form of ‘Korocracy’ that forces the younger generation to do their time ‘on the bench’²³ before gaining power. Note, nonetheless, that while the split between Soro and Ouattara is well and truly complete, the same cannot be said for the *Forces Nouvelles* as a whole or, more specifically, for the former members of the military wing, who largely remain loyal to the Ouattara government. If the ties of mutual debt between Ouattara and the latter are particularly complex, the Ouattara system appears to have managed to keep them ‘in step’. The question is for how long (see below). Finally, within the RDR, a further division exists that ties in with political divides along both class and generational lines. While this is less tangible for the moment, the death of heir apparent Amadou Gon Coulibaly and the debates over a replacement candidate have revealed a split between the old guard, or technocratic aristocracy of the RDR, and a fringe regarded as closer to the people, of which Prime Minister Hamed Bakayoko is perhaps the best symbol.²⁴ These rivalries within the ruling block, which overlap with the ‘generational handover’ debate, could prove to be central looking ahead to a post-Ouattara period.

Post-conflict as a class process: The divisive system of privileges

Another key factor in understanding the 2020 electoral crisis is to be found in the political economy of Ouattarist rule. The post-war regime fostered the rise of a group that had begun their struggle for access to state resources in the 1990s: a fraction of Northerners, whose rapid rise could be read, in Marxian terms, as the constitution of a ‘class for itself’ if not ‘a class in

23. ‘Faire banquette’, in the words of Yacouba Konaté, ‘Les enfants de la balle. De la Fesci aux mouvements de patriotes’, *Politique africaine* 89, 1 (2003), pp. 49–70.

24. This information is based on discussions with members of the RDR as well as field observations conducted between August 2020 and January 2021.

itself'. At the end of the conflict in 2011, the new head of state banked on an economic growth-led peace, launching major works and selling his fellow citizens dreams of a new Ivorian miracle that would match the economic success of the 1960s and 1970s. While the promised 'emergence' has proved a mirage for a large majority of Ivorians, the developmental claims of the state have nonetheless noticeably disrupted the structure of the elite. It has contributed to a rearrangement of social hierarchies within the state apparatus, helping to establish a new state bourgeoisie at the crossroads of the northern business networks, RDR officials, and former rebel leaders. Perpetuating the Houphouëtist encouragement to get rich—however illegally—this new coalition engaged in unbridled rent seeking on the back of newfound growth. The monopolization of positions of political and economic power by part of this new northern elite, which had been marginalized under Bédié and Gbagbo, smacked of revenge but was justified by Ouattara himself as a simple process of ethno-regional 'catch-up'.²⁵ The clashes between rival communities that marred the 2020 election come across as an *ivoirité*-based reaction to this northern 'catch-up'.

The real extent of this replacement of the elite is difficult to assess and has prompted fierce controversy over an alleged 'Dyula state', denounced even in zouglo songs.²⁶ What is clear, however, is that since 2011, a large number of actors from the north of the country have taken up senior positions both in public service and in government. The peace agreements prompted the integration of several thousand former rebels, mainly young people from the North, into various public services such as the army, the tax authorities, and education.²⁷ Our research suggests that they perceive their rise as the outcome of a long class and generational struggle, which began with Ouattara's arrival as prime minister in 1990, against the ageing Akan aristocracy who despised them.²⁸ In this respect, it could be argued that the Ouattara regime allowed the objectification, in the heart of the state, of class consciousness for part of the northern business elite, cemented by the politicization of the northern identity since the 1990s. While this

25. See his interview by Vincent Hugué: 'Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara veut "protéger les minorités"', *L'Express*, 25 January 2012, <https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/cote-d-ivoire-ouattara-veut-protoger-les-minorites_1075076.html> (24 February 2021).

26. Yodé et Siro, 'On dit quoi', *Héritage*, Universal Music Africa, 2020.

27. See Camille Popineau, 'Prendre la craie. La mobilisation des enseignants rebelles dans le Nord de la Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2011)', *Politique africaine* 148, 4 (2017), pp. 27–48 and Camille Popineau, 'De rebelle à fonctionnaire: Capital social, mobilisations et reconversions post-conflit dans les régions financières de Côte d'Ivoire', *Gouvernement et action publique* 8, 4 (2019), pp. 119–143.

28. These points are drawn from observations and interviews with many people from the North, particularly former rebel leaders, since 2011. They are by no means a claim of uniform thinking among Northern 'big men', and even less among 'Northerners' in the broadest sense, as this 'community' is obviously very diverse socially, economically, and politically.

'northern subjectivation' should not be generalized, we can note nonetheless that the Ouattara regime effected a break in the history of the Ivorian state elite, as the northern business community came to compete with the planter bourgeoisie and the intellectuals and teachers who formed the core of the Ivorian state under the PDCI and the FPI. The violence of the 2020 electoral crisis is not unrelated to this shift in the elite that seems to be profoundly transforming the Ivorian state, given the social environments from which the new big men of the Ouattarist 'emergence' are drawn.

The post-conflict regime is thus characterized by a political economy of redistribution based on regional and class privileges, in which a new dominant group has come to 'take its place'. The tensions around the 2020 elections express a radical challenge to this system of privileges by a part of the now marginalized former elite and all those excluded from the Ouattarist 'tontine' (patronage networks). One of the weaknesses of Ouattara's post-conflict strategy is indeed the lack of social policies for the most disadvantaged. In Côte d'Ivoire as elsewhere, strong macroeconomic results over the past decade mask a drastic surge in spatial and social inequalities, which are causing huge frustration among all those who see the 'emergence' as simply an 'énervence' (a pun meaning 'unbearable', often heard during our fieldwork). In recent years, this relative frustration has led the population to fight for improved living conditions by violently attacking the symbols of power. Even so, the opposition's calls for civil disobedience in October 2020 did not provoke a social revolution among those excluded from the 'emergence', except in certain localities of the Baoulé region, all PDCI strongholds, where the violence primarily targeted small traders and transporters from the north, following an *ivoirité*-based logic rather than class rivalries. Unlike in Burkina Faso in 2014,²⁹ there has been no convergence here between struggles over social issues and over the constitutional question of the third term. The hard-won peace and the memory of the war's violence most certainly played a part in the temperance of the 'dangerous classes'.

Still, it is important to bear in mind that behind these tensions around unequal wealth distribution lies a generational demand for equality of access to individual success and to the status of social elder,³⁰ which remains dependent on belonging to networks close to the regime. This demand goes beyond ethno-regional affiliations. While the selective redistribution system of the 'Korocracy' tends to favour people from the North, some young Northerners are also distrustful of the government and consider that Ouattara still owes them an outstanding debt.

29. See, for instance, Lila Chouli, 'The popular uprising in Burkina Faso and the transition', *Review of African Political Economy* 42, 143 (2015), pp. 148–155.

30. For a rural focus, see Léo Montaz, *Retour au village. Jeunesse et pouvoir en Côte d'Ivoire* (Karthala, Paris, 2020).

The insecurity of a model based on war debt

This issue of war debts remains a central parameter in the country's development and a key to understanding the 2020 electoral crisis. Recurrent army mutinies (November 2014 and January and May 2017) and clashes between army units (January 2018 and November 2020) or between military and police (September 2019) underline the structural fragility of a regime built on a subtle web of political-security patron–client networks and war debts owed to rebel leaders and their men. They also show that, under the guise of normalization, the post-conflict reconstruction process has not completely broken with the rebel and militia governance of the war years.

Yet significant efforts have been made to reform the SSR—with the support of France in particular.³¹ The situation has improved, but we should not be misled by the positive promotion of SSR: the *Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire* are still deeply marked by their rebel origins and the influence of the comzones, who have managed to convert their involvement in the insurgency into positions of power—economic power included. Appointed to top posts in the new army, the comzones took control of the economic capital as early as 2011, just as they had systematically bled dry the rebel zones they used to administer. Far from having ditched the predatory economy of the war years, the process of post-conflict 'normalization' paradoxically reinforced it by offering former warlords the means to 'institutionalize' their influence on the economy, the army, and the state apparatus.

The relationship of mutual dependence between the ex-comzones and the Head of State is complex. Ouattara depends partly on them to maintain order, but he is also very wary of them. Conversely, while the comzones may harbour grievances against the executive, they know full well that Ouattara offers them security from prosecution by the International Criminal Court. The former rebel leaders are closely monitored by the regime because of their presumed relationship with Guillaume Soro. It is indicative of his loss of influence that the appeal Soro made to them from Paris on 4 November 2020 to 'disobey illegal orders and join the National Transitional Council' went unheeded.³² The ex-comzones obviously have

31. See Philip A. Martin, 'Security sector reform and civil-military relations in postwar Côte d'Ivoire', *African Affairs* 117, 468 (2018), pp. 522–533.

32. Benjamin Roger, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Guillaume Soro appelle l'armée à "agir" face à Alassane Ouattara', *Jeune Afrique*, 4 November 2020, <<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1069363/politique/cote-divoire-guillaume-soro-appelle-larmee-a-agir-face-a-lassane-ouattara/>> (26 February 2021). No major movement was observed within the army as a result of this declaration. Moreover, Soro's call has even been widely criticized in the ranks of senior officers, especially by former members of the Forces Nouvelles (Interviews, Abidjan, November 2020).

more to lose than gain in a risky destabilization of a system that safeguards their interests.

Until 2017–2018, this government by payoff to former warlords appeared to be generally functional, with the latter keeping in check the impatience of their ex-combatants, whether integrated into the army or demobilized, through close patron–client relations. For the Ivorian army is also an army of *'gbonhi'* (meaning group or gang in Nouchi), i.e. a more or less coherent conglomeration of diverse factions of fighters who engaged in the insurgency under the leadership of a 'commander'—sometimes a simple *ziguei*, the leader of a neighbourhood gang—whom they obeyed more faithfully than the senior officers. Although informal, this 'filial' patron–client relationship between *'vieux pères'* and *'bons petits'* is a major parameter for understanding the country's security dynamics, from the beginning of the rebellion to today's electoral crisis. But this delegated model of intergenerational regulation seems to have reached its limits: the mutinies demonstrated that the comzones had in part lost their authority over their *'bons petits'*, an emancipation that can be gauged by the radicality of their revolt. The discreet arrest in early November 2020 of certain pro-Soro integrated ex-combatants underlines the division that exists between former rebels. By paying bonuses to the '8,400'³³ generation and giving them extra stripes in 2017, Ouattara deftly calmed the ex-rebels integrated into the army, who proved during the electoral crisis that they were disinclined to give up their advantages by engaging in a new violent conflict. Their inaction when Soro called on the army to mutiny against Ouattara's third term in early November is a clear illustration of this. Patron–client relations, inherited from the war and based on seniority, are still fundamental for the integrated ex-rebels and their former commanders.

They are less so, however, for demobilized ex-combatants, whose potential political manipulation is still a threat to stability. On paper, the number of 'combatants' registered and demobilized since the peace agreements (more than 70,000) is certainly substantial. But this number was artificially inflated for reasons of 'politics of the belly'. Indeed, in practice, the identification of DDR programme beneficiaries was largely entrusted to the comzones and politicians in the core political establishment, who favoured their relatives to the detriment of the 'real' combatants—particularly those earliest to enrol, who are now brooding bitterly over their exclusion, as evidenced by a considerable number of interviews we conducted during fieldwork. This rivalry between veterans who have been sidelined and eleventh-hour warriors who were integrated into the national army is a major weakness of the Ouattarist security system. Demobilized

33. The 8,400 rebel ex-combatants integrated into the army who, in 2017, obtained a bonus of 12 million CFA francs from the government.

combatants harbour huge resentment against their former commanders who have become 'big somebodies' and have got rich 'at their expense'. Excluded from reintegration into the army and therefore from their slice of the post-war 'cake', they are reconsidering their loyalty to their former chiefs and say they are willing to work for the highest bidder. For example, a former rebel fighter close to the late Wattao,³⁴ who had left the army without a service number and had become a gang leader in Abidjan, hired out his services for election day on 31 October. He recruited hundreds of young 'microbes'³⁵ to 'provide security' at the polling stations in Adzopé on behalf of a former trade unionist seeking election as a deputy.³⁶ The 'demos' have become an influential group in both security and political terms, particularly those in 'Cell 39', a reference to their registration number which attests to their early involvement in the rebellion in 2002 and therefore, according to them, to the debt the government owes them.³⁷ The fact that the president of Cell 39 was preventively arrested before the November 2020 elections is proof that the regime takes the threat posed by demobilized ex-combatants seriously.

Will this authoritarian and prebendal management of threats be enough to overcome the SSR's internal contradictions? It is not certain, as the current tensions must be understood in the light of this revenge of the '*bons petits*' on their '*vieux pères*' who have forgotten them. The award of bonuses and other symbolic payments have certainly helped to calm things down temporarily, as we saw during the October elections, but not necessarily to lastingly contain this process of emancipation from the personal and generational subordination that permeates the Ivorian security forces. On the contrary, this system of patronage, which favours certain units and certain generations of combatants, could ultimately weaken the Ouattara regime.

Conclusion: 'National reconciliation' as an instrument of authoritarianism

Back to the future, on 11 November 2020, Alassane Ouattara and Henri Konan Bédié met again after a 2-year feud and weeks of electoral violence. At the symbolic venue of the Hotel du Golf, the seat of their resistance to Gbagbo in 2011, they both pledged to resume dialogue for the sake of the country's reconciliation. Côte d'Ivoire's international partners were

34. One of the main military leaders of the rebellion, Issaka Ouattara, alias Wattao, was deputy commander in chief of the rebel forces and comzone of Seguela. After the war, he became deputy commander of the Garde républicaine.

35. 'Microbes' designates the gangs of youths from disadvantaged neighbourhoods who use violence as a means to social and economic advancement. See the report by Interpeace and Indigo, 'Exister par le "gbonhi"'. Engagement des adolescents et jeunes dits "microbes" dans la violence à Abobo' (2017), < (Interpeace & Indigo, Abidjan) <https://www.interpeace.org/fr/resource/engagement-adolescents-microbes/> > (18 March 2021).

36. Interview with the gang leader in question, Adjamé, 21 November 2020.

37. See Kamina Diallo, 'Cellule 39 in Côte d'Ivoire: The identification and mobilisation of a group of ex-combatants', *Afrique contemporaine* 263–264, 3 (2017), pp. 177–196.

pushing for this, even including the generational issue in the idea of ‘dialogue’.³⁸ But what does this ‘national reconciliation’ actually mean? Since the conflict ended in 2011, ‘reconciliation’ policies, far from healing the wounds of the past, have been the instruments of Ouattarist hegemony. Despite the establishment of an ad hoc commission in 2011, the ‘truth’ about the crimes committed during the war, particularly in the west by the FN, has been swept under the carpet; handing Gbagbo and Blé Goudé over to the ICC (International Criminal Court) was a failure and clearly raised the question of dealing with those responsible from the other camp, including Soro and all the comzones. The domestic justice system, for its part, has become a formidable tool for the political control of opponents, following a classic pattern of victor’s justice.

As many local and international observers have noted, the electoral crisis of 2020 has highlighted an ‘authoritarian tightening’ of power.³⁹ Under the guise of a discourse of emergence and post-conflict reconstruction, the Ouattara government has, since 2011, skilfully combined institutional reforms and official communication in favour of the rule of law on the one hand, and infringements on freedoms on the other, following a logic that is increasingly prevalent in comparable situations of ‘illiberal peacebuilding’.⁴⁰ Tensions around the prospect of a third presidential term have accentuated these authoritarian trends in the practices of power. The arrests of political leaders (such as Alain Lobogon, ‘Soul to Soul’ and other politicians close to Guillaume Soro, or Justin Koua, Secretary General and spokesman of the FPI, kidnapped from his home in Korhogo on 16 September 2020), religious leaders, and civil society activists (Pulcherie Gbalet and others), the invalidation of the 40 out of 44 candidates in the presidential election, and the repression of opposition leaders after the election are only the emerging face of a deeper structural dynamic of restriction of civic space. These abuses have prompted alerts from human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Civicus network.⁴¹

38. Borgia Kobri, ‘Côte d’Ivoire: Face à la tension, l’UE appelle à la reprise du dialogue politique en associant les nouvelles générations’, *PiaAfrica*, 3 November 2020, <<https://www.piaafrica.com/fr/articles/news/cote-divoire-face-a-la-tension-lue-appelle-a-la-reprise-du-dialogue-politique-en-associant-les-nouvelles-generations>> (26 February 2021).

39. See Maxime Ricard, “‘Mon président, on dit quoi ?’: Le resserrement autoritaire en Côte d’Ivoire”, *Bulletin FrancoPaix* 5, 9 (2020), pp. 3–7.

40. See Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, ‘Illiberal peacebuilding in Angola’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 49, 2 (2011), pp. 287–314.

41. See Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch annual reports on civil rights in Côte d’Ivoire, <<https://www.amnesty.fr/pays/cote-divoire>>; <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/cote-divoire>> (2 December 2020). See also the Civicus report, ‘Dégradation de l’espace civique avant les élections dans les pays francophones de l’Afrique de l’Ouest’ (2020), p. 17, <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/eena-reports/west-africa-report-2020_fr.pdf> (15 December 2020).

The adoption of a new Penal Code in June 2019 allowed the government to significantly restrict public freedoms, including the freedom of demonstration. The state of sanitary emergency declared in 2020 to deal with COVID-19 has provided the government with new opportunities to ban peaceful marches, notably those organized by civil society movements to enforce the constitutional limitation on mandates. Since then, civic movement activists have been regularly threatened, sometimes very violently, as evidenced by the knife attack on the president of the Coalition des Indignés de Côte d'Ivoire, Samba David, on 13 September at his office,⁴² or the death threats received by Alexandre Amani and Yvonne Toba, leaders of the civic movement, *Tournons la Page*.⁴³ In April 2020, the governmental decision to withdraw the possibility for individuals and NGOs (Non-governmental organizations) to bring cases before the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights also testifies to these restrictions of freedom. The pressure exerted by the regime on the media is also notable. Reports mention the arrest of six journalists since March 2020 sentenced to 2.5 million fines for fake news.⁴⁴ Cultural and music expression is also under surveillance, as testified by the quick conviction of Yode and Siro after they accused, during a concert in Yopougon on 29 November, the public prosecutor of bias in dealing with post-election violence. The famous zougloou singers were summoned to the gendarmerie, subjected to a lengthy interrogation, before being tried immediately and sentenced to a 1-year suspended prison sentence and a fine of 5 million CFA francs. It was the first time that singers were condemned for their words in the long history of the relationship between music and politics in Côte d'Ivoire.

The approach to resolving the 2020 electoral crisis is likely to stick to the blueprint of the prebendal carrot and judicial stick. The arrests of Affi N'Guessan and senior PDCI officials, and their recent release in the name of 'reconciliation', are undoubtedly a crucial bargaining chip for the regime, as were those of the former first lady Simone Gbagbo and, more recently, of Soro's close associates. Laurent Gbagbo has finally been granted a passport to return to the country, where the wait for him has generated real millenarianism hopes among his supporters.⁴⁵ On 15

42. David Yala, 'Voici le film de l'agression de Samba David. Le message des agresseurs', *Afrique sur 7*, 14 September 2020, <<https://www.afrique-sur7.fr/443095-film-agression-samba-david-agresseurs>> (10 January 2021).

43. Interviews, Abidjan, January and December 2020.

44. Reporters Without Borders, 'Six Ivorian journalists heavily fined in March', 2 April 2020, <<https://rsf.org/en/news/six-ivorian-journalists-heavily-fined-march>>; Media Foundation for West Africa, 'Editors fined for publishing statement calling for release of imprisoned opposition politician', 29 April 2020, <<https://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/court-fines-editors-for-publishing-press-statement-calling-for-release-of-imprisoned-opposition-politician>> quoted in Civicus, 'Dégradation de l'espace civique'.

45. See Armando Cutolo, 'Le retour de Gbagbo', in Fabio Viti (ed.), *La Côte d'Ivoire d'une crise à l'autre* (Karthala, Paris, 2014), pp. 109–130.

December, the day after his inauguration, Alassane Ouattara appointed a new minister of national reconciliation, in the person of Kouadio Konan Bertin, a dissident of the PDCI and the only candidate to have agreed to run for the presidential election (he received 1.99 percent of the vote). A sign of openness in favour of political dialogue or simply a delaying tactic consisting of dividing in order to rule better, this appointment alone signals how much the register of 'national reconciliation' has become a major political instrument in this post-conflict governmentality which is taking on the features of a new form of Houphouëtism, combining economic growth, accommodation between elites, patronage through the civil service, and, last but not the least, political repression. It is possible that this system of regulation may succeed, by carrot and stick, in restoring a semblance of stability in the short term under the guise of a resumption of 'political dialogue'. But will this stability be sustainable in the long run? In conclusion, this article suggests an ambivalent answer to this crucial issue.

Indeed, what can be expected from a top-down 'reconciliation' between old political leaders who have spent 30 years of clashing and making up in an interminable triangular competition? The inter-party conclaves and co-opting of opposition representatives that the winner would have to magnanimously set up will only reinforce his political stranglehold and reproduce the sort of 'Korocracy' that has dragged the country into a deadlock. It is not at all sure that the new generations, particularly the subalterns (*cadets sociaux*) left behind by 'emergence', have the means to overthrow this gerontocratic order, which is rooted in a deep 'political anatomy of domination'⁴⁶ and class relations. Nor is it clear that they even want to, having been lulled since the post-war years by promises of individual success from bling-bling capitalism blended with religiosity. It is perhaps in these dreams of youth upward mobility and these depoliticized imaginations of success that lies the strength of the hegemony of Ouattarism.⁴⁷ At a big concert at L'Internat in Yopougon, sponsored by a major mobile phone brand, DJ Kerozen perfectly expressed this new spirit of 'emerging' capitalism. Whereas the zouglou singers of the 1990s called for a revolt on campuses and in ghettos,⁴⁸ the new star sang that young people should learn to be patient, because to 'Climb', 'It's up to you'.

46. Béatrice Hibou has clearly illustrated this dynamic in a comparative perspective. See Béatrice Hibou, *The Political Anatomy of Domination* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2017).

47. See Richard Banégas and Jean-Pierre Warnier (eds), 'Figures de la réussite et imaginaires politiques', special issue of *Politique africaine* 82 (2001) pp. 5-132.

48. See Yacouba Konate, 'Generation Zouglou', *Cahiers d'études africaines* 168, 4 (2002), pp. 777-796; Anne Schumann, 'Popular music and political change in Côte d'Ivoire: The divergent dynamics of zouglou and reggae', *Journal of African Media Studies* 1, 1 (2009), pp. 117-133.

All the winners
 Are people who fought (...)
 Djo, the happiness you're looking for, it's up to you
 The promotion you're looking for, it's up to you
 The dream life you're looking for, it's up to you (...)
 Gotta get organized,
 Then you'll be able to achieve (...)
 You don't throw stones
 Where there's no bird
 All that you're looking for, it's up to you!⁴⁹

Money can't buy happiness, but since I've had it, I feel I look good
 I travel the world, from Yopougon to Monaco oooh! (...)
 The hard times are bad memories
 Cause God's second name, (it's time)
 It's don't hurry (it's time)
 If you work hard, you have every chance of making it (...)
 Little by little, you're bound to win out.⁵⁰

Tous ceux qui ont gagné
 Sont des gens qui ont bataillé (...)
 Djo, le bonheur que tu cherches là, ça dépend de toi
 Djo, le bonheur que tu cherches là, ça dépend de toi
 La vie de rêve que tu cherches là, ça dépend de toi (...)
 Faut t'organiser,
 Ainsi, tu pourras réaliser (...)
 On lance pas caillou
 Où y'a pas oiseau
 Tout ce que tu cherches là, ça dépend de toi, oh !

L'argent ne fait pas le bonheur, mais depuis que j'en ai, je me sens beau
 Je fais le tour du monde, de Yopougon à Monaco oooh! (...)
 Les moments de galère sont des mauvais souvenirs
 Car le second nom de Dieu, (c'est le temps)
 C'est ne te presse pas (c'est le temps)
 Si tu travailles dur, tu as toutes les chances de t'en sortir
 (...)
 Petit à petit, forcé pour toi va sortir

49. DJ Kerozen, 'Ça dépend de toi (ft. Serge Beynaud)', The Orchard Music, 2018.

50. DJ Kerozen, 'Le Temps', Magic Production Agencement, 2017.