Ivory Coast :

Background Information

October 2024

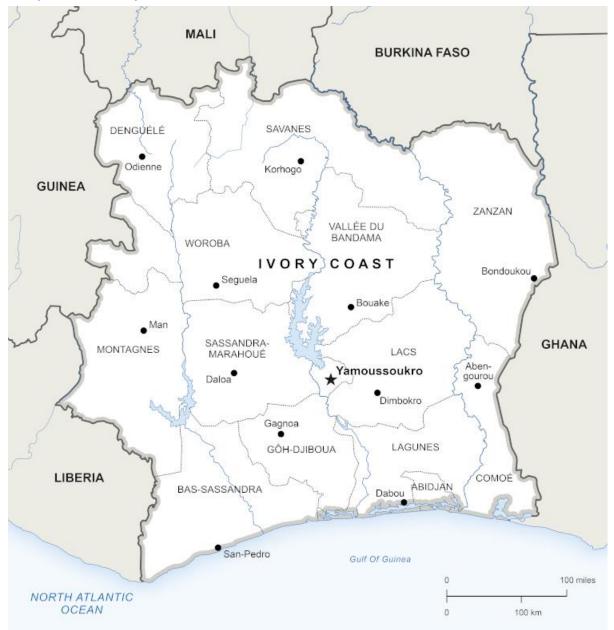# Contents

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World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country

Ivory Coast : Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
29,603,000	11,229,000	37.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

Due to its location, the country was at one time very important for the transatlantic slave trade. Muslim merchants established underlined trade routes from northern Africa to Ivory Coast in the Middle Ages, seeking gold, ivory and slaves (Sovereign Nations, 8 February 2018). Today the country shares borders with Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana. After imposing a protectorate over the coastal zone in 1842, France finally made Ivory Coast an official colony in 1893, making it part of French West Africa

that included Mauritania, Senegal, Mali (French Sudan), French Guinea, Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta), Benin (then Dahomey) and Niger (Source: BBC Ivory Coast profile, accessed 14 October 2024).

On 31 October 1960, Ivory Coast became an independent republic with a new Constitution. Felix Houphouet-Boigny became president and remained in office until he died in 1993. He declared a one-party system and ruled for more than thirty years. The country became stable and the economy grew. The president was hailed as "a leader capable of maintaining ethnic unity and political stability within a diverse and historically disunited country" (Source: Bellamy E: Ivory Coast - Conflict Under Democracy, Bertand publishers, October 2017). Yet below the surface, there were problems. The economic progress and relative stability could not mask the fact that political divisions in the country had not yet been overcome (KAS International Report, September 2015). As a result, ethnic and religious tensions increased in the 1990s and civil war broke out in 2002.

Henri Konan Bédié succeeded Felix Houphouet-Boigny as president in 1993 and was accused of corruption and bad governance, resulting in the suspension of economic aid in 1998. Bédié tried to build his power on nationalism, introducing what he called "Ivorité" or "Ivorian-ness." In December 1999, the armed forces conducted a bloodless coup. General Robert Guei assumed power and formed a government but was forced to flee the country in October 2000 after attempts at elections in which Gbagbo had declared himself the winner. The protests soon turned into a conflict that split the country in two, with Muslim rebels in the north and government control in the Christian south. Finally, in 2010 another election was held, and the Electoral Commission declared Ouattara to be the winner. However, Gbagbo refused to step down claiming election irregularities and a conflict ensued that led to the death of around 3,000 people. Eventually, Gbagbo was arrested and transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2011.

In 2015, President Ouattara won a second five-year term with nearly 84% of the vote, in an election described as credible by international observers. Early in 2020, Ouattara said he would not seek third term re-election, an attempt that would have needed constitutional amendment. In August 2020, however, he changed his mind and was formally elected by his party to run for the third term, a step which was validated by the country's top court. This change of tack by the incumbent president led to a series of protests. According to a report by International Crisis Group on 29 September 2020, the tension had already led to the death of 14 people. This renewed threat of violence had considerable implications for Christians, since this sort of crisis often bears religious undertones: Southerners (majority Christian) versus Northerners (majority Muslim). The constitutional court excluded former President Laurent Gbagbo from running in the presidential election (Al-Jazeera, 25 September 2020). As a result, it was just President Ouattara and ex-President Henri Konan Bédié competing for the presidential post on 31 October 2020. As reported by BBC News on 3 November 2020, Quattara won a third term with 94% of the vote.

As summarized by Freedom House in its Freedom in the World 2023 Ivory Coast report, over the past decade, the country has been working to recover from a devastating armed conflict that concluded in 2011. The nation has made some headway, particularly in the protection of civil liberties. However, the underlying causes of its past conflict — ethnic and regional tensions, land disputes, corruption and impunity — continue to fester. Election-related violence in 2020 marked a significant setback in this journey, yet there was a noticeable improvement in electoral conditions in 2021, permitting opposition groups and civil society to operate more openly than previously.

2022 brought a complex mix of political and socio-economic developments. Forty-nine Ivorian soldiers were arrested by authorities in Mali on charges of undermining Malian security. Most of them received prison sentences, causing diplomatic strain between the two nations. In a worrying move for civil liberties, Pulchérie Gbalet, president of the Ivorian Citizens Alternative, was placed in pre-trial detention, accused of colluding with a foreign power. She had been advocating for the release of the Ivorian soldiers detained in Mali, and her arrest raised concerns over the freedom of civil society actors. In a different vein, President Alassane Ouattara pardoned former President Laurent Gbagbo, who was facing a prison sentence for alleged theft of assets during the 2010–2011 conflict.

In a nutshell, Ivory Coast experienced a tumultuous recent history marked by political instability and civil unrest. The country, once a beacon of stability and economic prosperity in West Africa, plunged into crisis following the contested presidential election of 2010. The election saw incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo refusing to concede defeat to Alassane Ouattara, leading to a violent conflict that claimed over 3,000 lives. The crisis only ended after Gbagbo was arrested with the help of French forces and Ouattara was installed as president. Since then, Ouattara has focused on rebuilding the nation, restoring economic growth, and stabilizing the political landscape, though tensions remain. The 2020 presidential election reignited fears of conflict when Ouattara decided to run for a controversial third term, leading to protests and violence. Despite the unrest, Ouattara was re-elected, but the political atmosphere remains fragile, with opposition groups continuing to challenge the legitimacy of his presidency.

Beyond politics, Ivory Coast has faced ongoing security challenges, particularly in the northern regions, where the spread of jihadist groups from neighboring countries poses a significant threat. The country has also been grappling with issues related to ethnic divisions and land disputes, which have been sources of tension and conflict, especially in the western and central regions. Despite these challenges, Ivory Coast has managed to maintain a degree of economic growth, driven primarily by its cocoa and coffee industries, which remain the backbone of its economy. However, the ongoing political and security issues threaten to undermine this progress, as the country continues to navigate the delicate balance between reconciliation, economic development and maintaining peace.

On the security front, the country faces a complex and unstable environment. The country has been ramping up its military preparedness to counter jihadist threats emanating from neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso, exacerbated by the regional instability as made evident in the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea. Meanwhile, social divisions manifest in religious discrimination, especially in the northern regions. Converts to Christianity find it particularly challenging to obtain land for building churches and continue to face scrutiny from the government.

Political and legal landscape

Ivory Coast is a republic with a presidential multi-party system and a government with three branches: The executive, legislative, and judiciary. The president is elected for a five years term. The parliament is a unicameral National Assembly with 255 seats, with members elected to serve for five years. The country's legal system is based on French civil law. The country has more than one hundred registered political parties, the major ones being the Citizen's Democratic Union, Democracy and Liberty for the Republic, Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire, Ivorian Popular Front, Ivorian Worker's Party, Movement

of the Future Forces, Rally of the Republicans and Union for Democracy and Peace in Cote d'Ivoire (Britannica, accessed 14 October 2024).

In August 2018, President Ouattara pardoned 800 prisoners, including former First Lady Gbagbo who was serving a 20 year prison sentence for her role in the post-election violence that took place in 2010 (Reuters, 6 August 2018). Civil society organizations welcomed the news, but political tensions clearly heated up ahead of elections in October 2020. It was expected that the incumbent president would step down after finishing his second term. The president also said that he would not stand for re-election in October 2020, ending speculation about his political future ahead of a highly anticipated vote. However, when former prime minister and presidential candidate of the Rally of the Houphouëtist for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) Amadou Gon Coulibaly died unexpectedly in July 2020, President Ouattara reversed his previous decision and was nominated in August by the RDHP. His nomination was met with major protests from opposition parties. Subsequently, President Ouatarra was re-elected for a third term with a reported 94% of the vote in a controversial election, which the main opposition parties boycotted. The Ivorian National Human Rights Council reported on 10 November 2020 that 55 people were killed and 282 injured between 31 October and 10 November 2020 due to election protests (HRW, 2 December 2020).

The International Criminal Court's acquittal of former President Laurent Gbagbo (accused of committing crimes against humanity) in January 2019 raised tensions in the country ahead of the October 2020 elections (The Guardian, 15 January 2019). Gbagbo's supporters claim that his ousting was politically motivated (involving France) and that his transfer to the ICC was also a political vendetta; they also believe that - due to interference by Western countries - the election was not free and fair in October 2020; after the election, the opposition called for a transitional government to be formed (BBC News, 3 November 2020). Ex-president Gbagbo returned home to Ivory Coast in June 2021 upon invitation by President Ouatarra. He was welcomed by crowds of supporters who had gathered at the airport and on the streets of Abidjan amidst cheers (BBC News, 17 June 2021).

According to the Freedom in the World 2024 Ivory Coast report, the country continues to grapple with the lingering effects of its past conflicts, particularly those related to ethnic and regional tensions, land disputes, corruption, and a lack of accountability. Despite some progress in protecting civil liberties and allowing more freedom for civil society and political opposition since the contentious 2020 presidential election, the country remains partly free with significant challenges to its democratic processes. The ruling party, Rally of the Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP), has maintained a strong grip on power, further solidified by its victory in the 2023 municipal and regional elections, despite allegations of fraud by the opposition.

The political landscape in Ivory Coast is marked by ongoing disputes and tensions. The dismissal of Prime Minister Patrick Achi in October 2023, followed by the appointment of Robert Beugré Mambé, reflects the volatility within the government. Additionally, the death of former President Henri Konan Bédié in August 2023, a key opposition figure, has further complicated the political dynamics. While the country has seen some peaceful elections, the overall environment remains fraught with risks, particularly due to the unresolved issues from past conflicts and the dominant influence of the ruling party.

As reported by France 24 on 5 September 2023, Ivory Coast's ruling party, the RHDP, secured a sweeping victory in the local and regional elections held on 2 September 2023. This electoral win is viewed as an indicator of political stability and public support for the ruling party ahead of the presidential elections slated for 2025. The Independent Electoral Commission revealed that the RHDP won in 123 municipalities and 25 regions, significantly outnumbering the combined wins of the two main opposition parties, the Democratic Party (PDCI) and the African People's Party - Ivory Coast (PPA-CI), which had formed alliances in many areas to contest the RHDP. They managed to secure only 34 municipalities and four regions.

The elections were relatively peaceful, especially when compared to the tumultuous presidential elections three years ago that resulted altogether in 85 deaths. Some isolated incidents and allegations of irregularities were reported but did not significantly disrupt the electoral process. Notably, this was the first election since former President Laurent Gbagbo returned to the country, although he could not vote due to a prior conviction. Senior figures of the ruling party, including Prime Minister Patrick Achi and Defense Minister Tene Birahima Ouattara, also won comfortably in their respective regions. The president of the electoral commission urged candidates to accept the results peacefully, setting a cautiously optimistic tone for the political climate leading up to the October 2025 presidential election.

In general, despite some progress, the political landscape in Ivory Coast still reflects a nation grappling with multifaceted challenges that span governance, civil liberties and national security. Although the situation has improved since the election-related violence in 2020, the administration under President Alassane Ouattara continues to draw criticism for its constraints on freedom of assembly and media/press. Despite such governmental control, in the background there is ongoing corruption that has permeated multiple layers of governance, affecting the judiciary and potentially undermining the rule of law in the country.

As indicated by the World Bank: "Efforts towards national reconciliation recently received a boost with the release of 51 political prisoners, including former military commanders, who were jailed for their roles in the 2010-2011 post-electoral crisis. This move has been hailed by opposition parties as a positive stride towards the much-awaited national unity. All eyes are now on the next presidential election scheduled for October 2025."

In conclusion, Ivory Coast remains a country deeply affected by its past conflicts and ongoing political tensions. Despite the implementation of a multi-party system and progress in some areas of civil liberties, the nation's political landscape is still marred by ethnic and regional divisions, corruption, and a lack of transparency. The ruling party's dominance, coupled with the government's control over freedom of assembly and the press, reflects a democratic process that is far from fully realized. Moreover, the security situation in the country is precarious, with rising threats from jihadist groups in neighboring regions. Religious persecution, particularly against Christians, adds another layer of complexity to the already volatile environment.

Religious landscape

Ivory Coast : Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	11,229,000	37.9
Muslim	10,630,000	35.9
Hindu	2,100	0.0
Buddhist	15,000	0.1
Ethnic religionist	7,619,000	25.7
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	41,400	0.1
Atheist	3,100	0.0
Agnostic	54,600	0.2
Other	9,900	0.0
OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2023 Ivory Coast):

- *Religious majorities:* Muslims are to be found predominantly in the north and Christians in the south, although members of both religions, as well as other faiths, are spread throughout the country.
- *Muslim community:* The majority of Muslims in Ivory Coast are Sunnis, making up 95% of the Muslim population, many of whom are Sufi. The Muslim community also includes Shia Muslims, predominantly from the Lebanese community, and Ahmadis.
- *Religious practices:* Many Ivorians, despite identifying as Christian or Muslim, also incorporate aspects of Indigenous religious beliefs into their practices.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank's Ivory Coast overview (last updated 3 October 2024):

- Ivory Coast "has maintained a resilient trajectory despite global and regional disruptions, posting an average real GDP growth of 6.5% between 2021 and 2023—though still shy of pre-pandemic highs. Looking ahead, growth is projected to remain robust at 6.5% in 2024".
- As well as being the world's leading cocoa producer, the country has been known for years as the world's largest exporter of raw cashew nuts, providing over 25% of global supply and is now a leader in cashew processing which has boosted exports.

- "[G]rowth prospects remain favorable, with an average annual expansion of 6.5% forecast from 2024 to 2026. Key drivers include promising developments in the hydrocarbon sector, improvements in the business climate, and strategic investments in transport, digital infrastructure, and agricultural supply chains".
- "The government aims to halve poverty and achieve upper-middle-income status by 2030."

According to the Africa Development Bank's 2024 Economic Outlook:

- ***Growth in 2023:*** Ivory Coast's economy displayed significant resilience and growth in 2023, with real GDP growth rising to 6.5% from 6.2% in 2022. The country's economic performance was bolstered by substantial investments in both the public and private sectors, alongside strong activity in agriculture, construction, manufacturing and trade. Despite a notable decline in cocoa production, other sectors compensated, leading to overall positive economic outcomes.
- ***Inflation in 2023:*** This decreased from 5.2% to 4.4% due to effective monetary policies and government efforts to mitigate the high cost of living.
- ***Outlook and future growth prospects:*** The economic outlook for 2024–25 remains optimistic, with real GDP growth expected to average 7%. Key drivers of this growth include increased cocoa production, infrastructure investments, and the exploitation of newly discovered oil and gas fields. Fiscal consolidation efforts are projected to further reduce the budget deficit, while the current account deficit is expected to narrow, reflecting ongoing improvements in the country's economic fundamentals.
- ***Structural transformation:*** The structural transformation of Côte d'Ivoire's economy is underway, with the industrial sector's contribution to GDP increasing, while the share of agriculture has declined. Continued investment in infrastructure, technological innovation, and human capital is crucial to accelerating this transformation. The government's focus on improving the business climate and actively managing public debt will also play a significant role in sustaining long-term growth.

According to the 2024 Index of Economic Freedom:

- ***Economic freedom score:*** 58.4, ranking it #91 out of 184 countries globally and #7 out of 47 in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. The country's score has decreased by 2 points from the previous year, placing it in the "mostly unfree" category.
- ***Limited progress:*** Despite robust investment in sectors like agriculture, mining, and manufacturing, progress in strengthening the four pillars of economic freedom—rule of law, government size, regulatory efficiency, and open markets—remains limited.
- ***Key challenges and opportunities:*** The country's weak judiciary and persistent corruption undermine property rights and judicial effectiveness, contributing to a low overall rule of law score. The informal sector continues to be a significant source of employment due to the underdeveloped labor market. On a positive note, the country has a relatively stable financial sector, with a business freedom score above the world average, and trade and investment freedom scores reflecting an openness to foreign investment. However, the fiscal health of the country remains a concern, with public debt at 56.8% of GDP and fiscal policies needing further improvement to foster sustainable economic growth.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Ivory Coast (accessed 14 October 2024) and UNDP Human Development Report Ivory Coast (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- *Main ethnic groups:* Akan 28.9%, Voltaique or Gur 16.1%, Northern Mande 14.5%, Kru 8.5%, Southern Mande 6.9%, unspecified 0.9%, non-Ivorian 24.2% (2014 est.)
- *Main languages:* French (official), 60 native dialects of which Dioula is the most widely spoken.
- *Population growth rate:* 2.21% (2021 est.)
- *Urban population:* 52.2% of the total population (2021)
- *Rate of urbanization:* 3.38% (2020 -2025 est.)
- *Overall median age:* 20.3 years
- *Expected years of schooling:* 10.0 years
- *Literacy rate, adult (ages 15 and older):* 47.2%
- *Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older):* 55.1%
- *Unemployment, total:* 3.3% of labor force
- *Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):* 5.1%
- *Human Development Index 2020:* Ivory Coast is ranked 162nd out of 189 countries with a score of 0.538 points
- *Life expectancy at birth:* 57.8 years
- *Gender Development Index (GDI):* 0.811 points
- *Gender Inequality Index (GII):* 0.638 points

According to the Migrants/Refugee's country profile (accessed 20 September 2023):

- *International and internal migrants:* "Since 2012, Ivory Coast has enjoyed robust and stable economic growth and remains an economic hub in francophone West Africa, attracting millions of migrants from across the region. Ivory Coast constitutes one of the top ten migration corridors in Western Africa, and is the number one destination country for migrants within Western Africa. As of mid-2020, Ivory Coast was host to 2,564,857 million migrants that constitute 9.7% of the population. The migration corridor from Burkina Faso to Ivory Coast had the largest number of migrants – 1,376,3540 migrants, followed by Mali with 522,146 migrants, and Guinea with 167,516 migrants. Like other regions in Africa, migration within this region is highly influenced by economic factors, including the prospects of finding work in the host country, economic hardship and poverty in the home country, and business prospects in the host country. Other remote factors include educational opportunities and family reunification. Migration within the region is partly influenced by an aspiration for regional economic integration, contributing to free movement of people within the region and the right to residency and establishment within the framework of the regional organisation of ECOWAS."
- *Emigration and skilled migration:* "According to the global economy index, Ivory Coast experienced a decline in its flight and brain drain index from 7.30 in 2017 to 6.40 in 2021. As of mid-2020, there were 1.1 million Ivorian emigrants across the globe. The top countries of destination of Ivorians include Burkina Faso (557,732), Mali (188,250), France (99,031), Ghana (72,728), and Benin (33,996). Among Ivorian emigrants, 47.6% had received a lower level of education, while 30.7% had received higher education. These include medical doctors, nurses, and those involved in the manufacturing, distribution, and services activities. Despite the decline

in personal remittances from 2011, emigrants contributed 0.528% of the GDP in 2020 in the form of personal remittance payments."

- *Refugees:* "Despite political tensions and social unrest in its past, Ivory Coast has kept its borders open to those seeking protection. Recently, there have been a greater number of refugees leaving Ivory Coast than entering. As of January 2021, there were 25,597 refugees who fled Ivory Coast to Liberia, Guinea, Ghana, and Togo, with Liberia hosting 95% (24,234) of them. As of June 30, 2021, there were 1,167 refugees and 401 asylum seekers in Ivory Coast. The majority of them come from the Central African Republic (506), the Syrian Arab Republic (142), the Democratic Republic of Congo (132), Congo (86), Liberia (72), and Rwanda (55). A total of 174 are unspecified. The Ivorian government encourages refugees to integrate locally rather than placing them in camps. However, there are some refugee camps located in certain parts of the country. For example, there is a transit refugee camp in Tabou – designated solely for refugees in transit, and another in Peacetown in Nicla, near Guiglo."

- *IDPs*: "Internal displacement in Ivory Coast is primarily caused by conflict and violence. As of 2020, there were 308,000 people displaced by conflicts and violence, as well as 70 people displaced by natural disasters. As was the case with the aftermath of the presidential election in 2010-2011, the 2020 presidential election led the country yet into another period of post-election violence, causing massive internal displacement. This post-election violence has resulted in thousands of IDPs within Ivory Coast, mostly in the western region of the country. As of November 2020, the UN agencies and the Ivorian government had recorded 5,530 new IDPs within the country. Women in Ivory Coast have borne the brunt of internal displacement, as displacement caused by conflict and violence exposes women to human rights violation and adversely affects their sources of livelihood, since conflict results in the destruction of production capital."

- *Victims of human trafficking:* "Ivory Coast is ranked Tier 2 in the Trafficking in Person Report 2021, as the country does not meet the minimum standard for the cancellation of human trafficking activities. However, the government is making a significant effort to meet the minimum standards. Ivory Coast is a source, transit, and destination country of victims of human trafficking, specifically forced labour, sex trafficking, and to a lesser extent, drug trafficking. At the international level, Ivory Coast has established a formal agreement with other countries to combat human and child trafficking, including Burkina Faso. The government runs shelters for child victims of exploitation in Soubre and refers child trafficking victims to NGOs for long-term care. However, there is limited support for adults, making them vulnerable to re-victimisation. The majority of victims identified are children. Traffickers exploit Ivorian women and girls in forced labour in domestic service, restaurants, and sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Ivorian and Burkinabe boys in forced labour in the agricultural and service industries, especially in cocoa production. Victims of human trafficking in Ivory Coast come from rural parts of the country, as well as Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Morocco, and China. They are mostly located in Abidjan, northern and central Ivory Coast, and western mining regions, particularly near the gold mines in Tengrela. Nigeria human trafficking victims transit Ivory Coast en route to exploitation in sex trafficking in Asia, the United Arab Emirates, and North Africa. Religious leaders also recruit women and girls for work in the Middle East and Europe."

According to updated UNHCR data (accessed 28 March 2024): As of 29 February 2024, there were 2,364 refugees in Ivory Coast and 51,211 asylum seekers. The great majority of asylum seekers come from Burkina Faso.

Technological landscape

According to DataReportal Digital 2024: Ivory Coast (23 February 2023) / survey date - January 2024:

- *Internet usage*: 11.23 million internet users, with Internet penetration reaching 38.4% of the population. This indicates a significant portion of the population is now connected online, reflecting ongoing efforts to improve digital infrastructure.
- *Social media usage*: Social media continues to gain traction, with 7 million users in the country, making up 23.9% of the total population. This growing engagement on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn demonstrates the increasing role of social media in communication and information sharing.
- *Active cellular mobile connections*: The country has a striking number of cellular mobile connections, totaling 43.59 million, which equates to 149.1% of the total population. This suggests that many Ivorians own more than one mobile device, emphasizing the central role of mobile technology in accessing the Internet and digital services.
- *Platform-specific engagement*: Facebook remains the most popular social media platform with 8.76 million users, followed by Messenger with 7.65 million users. Instagram and LinkedIn have 1.18 million and 1.44 million users, respectively, highlighting the diverse ways Ivorians engage with digital content and professional networks.
- *Digital growth and future outlook:* The continued expansion of Internet and mobile access indicates a positive trajectory towards greater digital inclusion. However, the challenge remains to ensure that this growth translates into improved digital literacy and equitable access across different regions of the country.

According to BuddeComm (Last updated: 29 July 2024):

- "The fixed internet and broadband sectors remain underdeveloped. This is a legacy of poor international connectivity, which resulted in high wholesale prices, limited bandwidth, and a lack of access for alternative operators to international infrastructure. These limitations were addressed following the landing of a second cable in November 2011, and the end to the monopoly of access to international bandwidth held by Orange Côte d'Ivoire. Orange Group has also launched its 20,000km Djoliba cable system, reaching across eight countries in the region. Available international bandwidth for Côte d'Ivoire increased 126% in 2023, year-on-year."

Security situation

Ivory Coast is grappling with multifaceted security challenges, exacerbated by regional instability and the expanding footprint of jihadist organizations in the Sahel. The country has proactively bolstered its northern security apparatus and initiated socio-economic projects to combat poverty and youth unemployment. Yet, these efforts are taking place against a backdrop of worsening regional security due to political coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger. This volatile environment raises concerns that Western security arrangements are losing ground, potentially offering militant groups even more

room for expansion. Even though no terrorist attacks have been reported during recent months, the threat remains significant.

Ever since the 2016 Grand Bassam beach attack that killed 18 people, there has been growing apprehension about jihadist violence expanding into the country (Counter Extremism Project, accessed 14 October 2024). More recently, this fear was substantiated with a series of attacks in the north of the country between 2020 and 2021. Such threats are not just national security issues but also deeply affect religious minorities like Christians, who are increasingly targeted in regional militant activities.

According to multiple reports, groups like al-Qaida affiliate Jamat'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and its sub-group Katiba Macina have expanded their activities into northern areas of Ivory Coast. These groups have targeted both security forces and civilians, and there is growing concern that they will continue to recruit from vulnerable segments of the population, such as unemployed youth. In December 2022, the judiciary in Ivory Coast handed down life sentences related to the 2016 jihadist attack, underscoring the ongoing judicial response to these threats. Despite increased military recruitment and bilateral operations with neighboring countries like Burkina Faso, the risk of sporadic attacks and kidnappings, particularly in the northern regions, remains high.

Christian origins

French missionaries introduced Christianity in 1637, but the Church did not grow until France established its protectorate over the country, which lasted from the 1830s until 1960. In 1911, Catholic mission stations were established in the southern part of the country first and then in Korhogo in the north. In 1924, Protestant missionaries came with the arrival of British Methodists. Other organizations and churches such as the World Evangelism Crusade (WEC), the Seventh-day Adventists, the Free Will Baptists and the Assemblies of God entered the country in the 1930s.

(*Source: J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann (eds): Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices, 2nd Edition, 2010*).

Church spectrum today

Ivory Coast : Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	25,000	0.2
Catholic	5,754,000	51.2
Protestant	3,495,000	31.1
Independent	1,302,000	11.6
Unaffiliated	810,000	7.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-157,000	-1.4
Total	**11,229,000**	**100.0**
(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)		
Evangelical movement	2,490,000	22.2
Pentecostal-Charismatic	2,822,000	25.1

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: *Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox.* **Roman Catholics:** *All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome.* **Protestants:** *Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics.* **Independents:** *Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant).* **Unaffiliated Christians:** *Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches.* **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** *Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once.* **Evangelical movement:** *Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls.* **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** *Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".*

Christians are a majority in the south and include Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, Greek Orthodox, Copts, the Celestial Church of Christ and Assemblies of God.

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Ivory Coast
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/.

External Links

- Recent history: trade routes - https://sovereignnations.com/2018/04/30/history-arab-slave-trade-africa/
- Recent history: BBC Ivory Coast profile - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13287216
- Recent history: political divisions - http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_42800-544-2-30.pdf?151012165215

- Recent history: International Crisis Group - https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/c%C3%B4te-divoire/b161-cote-divoire-reporter-pour-dialoguer
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