

Exercise Caution During Post-Election Period Unrest

Risk Level Indicator

HIGH

Unrest was reported across the Ivory Coast on Saturday 31 October as polling stations opened for the presidential election. On the ground reports have indicated that road blockages, traffic disruption and violent and unruly protests were reported in multiple urban centres. There were also reports of looting and vandalism targeting local Electoral Commission (CEI) offices. The most significant unrest on Saturday occurred in Abidjan, with several people reported killed.

Voters headed to the polls on Saturday, amidst heightened tensions and unrest over the president's bid to remain in power. In the country's economic centre Abidjan the streets were quiet on election day with many staying home for fear of violence while others having already left the commercial capital for villages in the provinces ahead of the vote. Witnesses reported that voting went smoothly, with orderly lines at polling stations in a number of districts. Reports however indicate that in the city's Blockhauss neighbourhood, around twenty young men blocked the entrance to a school, preventing would-be voters from entering until police dispersed the group. Violence was reported in some opposition strongholds in the centre of the country on Saturday. In Tiebissou in the centre of the country, the heartland of opposition candidate and former president Henri Konan Bédié, officials indicated that "young armed men from the surrounding villages...fired on the other young people." Four were killed and 27 others were injured by bullets and machetes. A government official also reported that one other person was killed in the pro-Bédié town of Niabli. Main opposition candidates Pascal Affi N'Guessan and Henri Konan Bédié opted to boycott the vote and urged voters to boycott the election, in a move that is expected to hand Ouattara victory though it may also undermine the legitimacy of a third term. There were further reports on Saturday of roads being blocked in opposition strongholds and election material being burned, though so far, it appears that the Ivory Coast has been spared the kind of widespread violence that many feared would erupt on election day. While the streets of Abidjan remained quiet on Sunday, the atmosphere across the country remained tense ahead of partial results expected to be released later that day.

On 1 November, Ivory Coast's electoral commission started to announce preliminary results of the election, with the incumbent leader taking a strong early lead. With two of the four candidates boycotting the vote, incumbent President Ouattara is expected to win, particularly in the northern region of the country, which is known to be a stronghold of the president. Preliminary results indicate that President Ouattara obtained 98% of the votes in Korhogo, the northern capital, with an 88% participation rate. Overall, preliminary results indicate that so far, he has won all 26 of the voting districts that were announced by the electoral commission on Sunday. There are a total of 108 districts.

In a joint statement released on Sunday, opposition candidates Bédié and Affi N'Guessan disclosed that about 30 people had died since Saturday, though they provided no further details on the casualty figures. Speaking to reporters, Affi N'Guessan disclosed that "the opposition calls for this moment for a general mobilization to block this dictatorship," stating that fewer than 10% of people had turned up to the vote, without providing evidence. While no official estimates of election turnout have been released, a domestic observer mission reported that 23% of polling places did not open at all because of opposition interference, which included barricading roads and threatening election staff.

Opposition leaders on Sunday also called for a "civil transition" from incumbent President Ouattara's government. Both Affi N'Guessan and Bédié had previously called Ouattara's bid for a third term "unconstitutional," with Affi N'Guessan stating on Sunday that it was the "end" of Ouattara's mandate. The RHDP ruling party meanwhile has "warned" the opposition "against any attempt at destabilization."

CONTEXT

Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara has confirmed that he will stand for a third term in office in the 31 October 2020 presidential election. While President Ouattara had been expected to stand down at the end of his current term, the sudden death of his expected successor, Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, on 8 July 2020 effectively left the ruling RHDP party with no clear candidate going into the election period. The president's decision to stand for a controversial third term has been opposed by the opposition and civil society groups, with many feeling that he should have simply nominated another member of his party to contest the vote. The president however argues that his first term should not be counted, as constitutional amendments that limit an elected president to two terms in office were introduced during his second term. In recent weeks, unrest linked to the issue has resulted in a number of fatalities and dozens of arrests.

TRAVEL ADVISORY

Road blockages, traffic disruptions and potentially violent and unruly protests are to be anticipated in urban centres in the coming days, as the country's Election Commission announces the official results. Heightened security measures should be anticipated in the vicinity of any demonstrations and protests, particularly as a ban on gatherings remains in place amidst COVID-19 restrictions. Further election-related unrest is likely to take place across the country as the population awaits the election results.

MS RISK ADVISORY: Those in the Ivory Coast are advised to monitor developments and to remain aware of the political situation. You should avoid all public demonstrations and political gatherings as a precaution, as they may turn violent with little or no warning; avoid discussing sensitive political topics in public or on social media; and follow all instructions and advisories issued by the local authorities.

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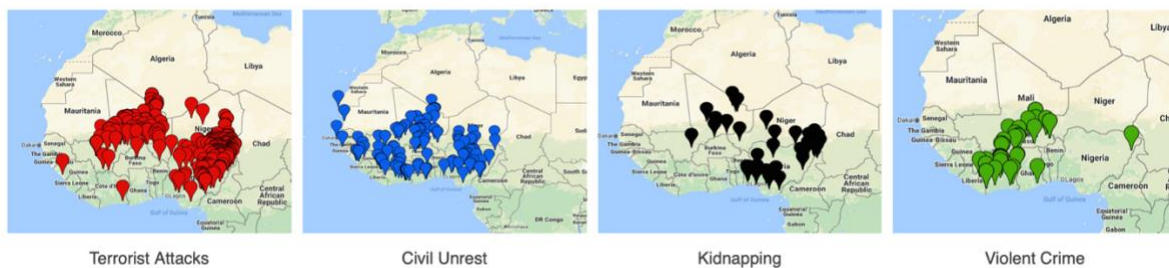
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