

Efforts to Ensure a Peaceful Presidential Election in Côte d'Ivoire in October 2020

EARLY WARNING COUNTRY REPORT SEPTEMBER 15, 2020



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FOREWORD

The Center for Research and Action for Peace (CERAP) is both a social and academic institution that works for the promotion of the human person, respect for the common good, the emergence of open, united African societies, and respect for human dignity. It is in this perspective that CERAP has been engaged for several years, in Côte d'Ivoire and in the West African sub-region, in the pursuit of peace and the consolidation of social cohesion through actions and intellectual research.

This study on the presidential election of October 31, 2020 in Côte d'Ivoire is part of CERAP's effort to consolidate peace in Côte d'Ivoire, a country whose socio-political stability is crucial for all of West Africa.

This study follows a previous early warning report published in July 2019 by Arsène Brice Bado of CERAP and Mollie Zapata of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Fifteen months before the presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire, this first report alerted the public to the need to take significant action in order to pacify the presidential election, which promised to be tense and involved risks of potential violence.

Fourteen months later, this report explores the initiatives implemented by the various actors with a view to pacifying the upcoming presidential election. The research indicates that, though some actions have been taken by and international actors, much remains to be done to pacify the electoral process. The report concludes with recommendations to this end.

Peace in Côte d'Ivoire must prosper as much as the economy, and can only do so through respect for human dignity, democratic values, and prioritization of principles of the rule of law and reconciliation.

As the elections approach, this is the expectation of CERAP. This is not a passive hope, but an active one, inviting everyone to take action to ensure peace. Each of us can contribute in our own way to peacebuilding by rejecting aggressive behavior that leads to violence.

We should thank all the partners of CERAP who love justice and peace and who strive to make the voice of reason, justice, and of peace heard.

We thank the Simon-Skjoldt Center at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., of which Arsène Brice Bado is a fellow, for its excellent work in preventing atrocity crimes around the world.

Long live peace in Côte d'Ivoire and may brotherhood prevail over violence, especially during this presidential election period.

Hyacinthe LOUA, sj, PhD.

Director of CERAP

INTRODUCTION¹

In July 2019, 15 months before the presidential election of October 2020, Mollie Zapata and I published an Early Warning Report² on the risk of violence in Côte d'Ivoire during what is expected to be a tense election. Our analysis encouraged the Ivorian government and its international partners to pay immediate attention to the situation and act in advance to mitigate risks, prevent violence, and help save lives. We proposed various political options for avoiding the possibility of violence.

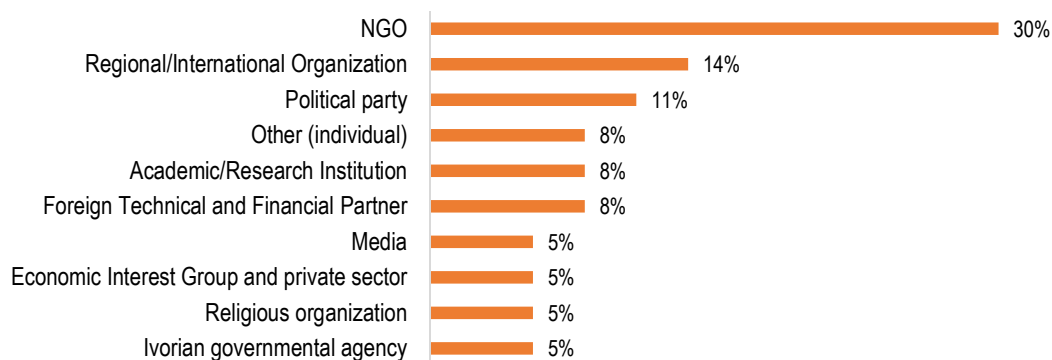
The goal of this new study is to update the analysis of the situation and to examine what has been done so far by Ivorian and foreign governments and by civil society to prevent violence. This report is being published before the election to describe the measures that have been taken to prevent violence thus far, so that programs can be modified for greater effectiveness as the election approaches.

METHODOLOGY

This study of efforts to ensure a peaceful electoral process is limited to election violence prevention activities that are currently underway. Less than two months before the election, several civil society organizations are still seeking funding for activities that they intend to conduct during the electoral process. These planned activities have not been taken into account.

The study is based on both documentary research and in-person or online interviews with 37 sources (organizations and individuals) as seen in the graph below. A research workshop was also held on July 23, 2020, with representatives of organizations that had taken part in the survey, including 10 from civil society organizations and 4 from political parties. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews took place only in Abidjan from June 2 to July 24, 2020.

Graph 1: Sample



UPDATING THE EARLY WARNING REPORT OF JULY 2019

With the October 2020 presidential election seven weeks away, it is necessary to update the scenarios and uncertainties described in the Early Warning Report published in July 2019 (15 months before the presidential election).

¹ Financial support for this research was provided by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The assertions, opinions, and conclusions in this report are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. | This report was written in French and translated by Kate Deimling.

² Arsène Brice Bado et Mollie Zapata. "Election Uncertainty: Preventing Atrocities Crimes in Côte d'Ivoire." *Early Warning Report Côte d'Ivoire*, Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, July 2019, 44p. See also: <https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/>.

Reviewing plausible scenarios of violence

In July 2019, the Simon-Skjoldt Center Early Warning Report suggested three plausible mass atrocity scenarios.³ These scenarios were described by some observers as alarmist.⁴ However, 13 months after these scenarios were published, tumultuous socio-political events in Côte d'Ivoire have shown that there were indeed reasons for concern and that the early warning was justified in order to prevent the occurrence of scenarios of mass violence. Below, I provide an updated assessment of the three scenarios presented in the initial report as well as one additional scenario:

➤ ***Scenario A: Supporters of the Unified RHDP (Ouattara) versus supporters of Soro.***

A clash between the government of President Alassane Ouattara government and former Prime Minister Guillaume Soro did in fact take place. It was a legal confrontation that fortunately did not lead to mass violence. After resigning from the position of President of the National Assembly on February 8, 2019,⁵ Soro also resigned from the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). On October 18, 2019, he announced his candidacy for president. On December 23, 2019, on his way home from Europe, his plane was not allowed to land in Abidjan.⁶ Since then, he has been in exile in France. The Ivorian justice system issued an international warrant for his arrest.⁷ He was tried in absentia and sentenced to 20 years in prison for "receiving embezzled public funds" and "money laundering" by the Abidjan criminal court.⁸ Additionally, approximately 15 people close to Soro were arrested on December 23, 2019, and held at the Abidjan prison "for public disorder and spreading false information."⁹ To sum up, "the Ivorian judicial authorities accuse Soro and his circle of planning a military and civilian insurrection to overthrow republican institutions."¹⁰ Whatever validity these accusations may have, they seem politically motivated, considering the upcoming presidential election. All in all, although the clash between the Soro and the Ouattara (or RHDP) factions took place in the legal system and resulted in a court case, imprisonment, and exile without degenerating into lethal violence, this clash still added more tension to the upcoming election.¹¹ The friction between RHDP supporters and supporters of Soro's Generations and Peoples Solidarity (GPS) party is now more significant and dangerous. Rapprochement or peacemaking between the two sides before the 2020 election is highly desirable in order to ensure a peaceful electoral process.

➤ ***Scenario B: Supporters of the Unified RHDP (Ouattara) versus supporters of the PDCI (Bédié).***

A clash between the RHDP and the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) also took place in the legal system through the prosecution and sentencing of Jacques Mangoua, president of the Regional Council of Gbêkê (central Côte d'Ivoire) and vice-president of the PDCI. Mangoua was arrested on September 21, 2019 and sentenced on October 3, 2019 to five years in prison by the Bouaké court for "possession of weapons of war without administrative authorization."¹² During the trial, "there were clashes between police and supporters of Jacques Mangoua who came to

³ Arsène Brice Bado et Mollie Zapata, *Op.cit.*, pp. 20-23.

⁴ See the statement by the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) of September 25, 2019.

⁵ See Guillaume Soro's resignation speech in the National Assembly: <https://www.fratmat.info/article/87647/60/demission-du-president-guillaume-soro-l-integralite-de-son-discours-a-l-assemblee-nationale>.

⁶ See Abidjan.net, "Annoncé à Abidjan: L'avion de Soro détourné sur une autre destination, ses partisans déroutés," <https://news.abidjan.net/h/667503.html>. Published on December 23, 2019.

⁷ See K. Richard Kouasssi, "En exil en France, Guillaume Soro livre un nouveau combat," <https://www.afrique-sur7.fr/441014-exil-combat-guillaume-soro>. Published on June 9, 2020.

⁸ On Guillaume Soro's prison sentence, see <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-52464985>.

⁹ LB/ls, "Côte d'Ivoire: 15 proches de Soro déférés à la MACA pour trouble à l'ordre public," <https://news.abidjan.net/h/667573.html>. Published Wednesday, December 25, 2019.

¹⁰ Arnaud Houssou, "Les pro-Soro présentés au juge d'instruction," <https://www.7info.ci/les-pro-soro-presentes-au-juge-d-instruction/>. Published 2/25/2020.

¹¹ See International Crisis Group, "Côte d'Ivoire: Defusing Electoral Tensions Amid Polarised Politics," in Watch List 2020 – Spring Edition, 26 May 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/watch-list-2020-spring-edition#cote_ivoire.

¹² André Silver Konan, "Côte d'Ivoire: Jacques Mangoua condamné à 5 ans de prison au terme d'un procès sous tension," in *Jeune Afrique* (October 4, 2019), <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/838320/societe/cote-divoire-jacques-mangoua-condamne-a-5-ans-de-prison-au-terme-dun-proces-sous-tension/>.

support him. Romaric Kouassi N'Guessan, a 32-year-old PDCI supporter, was killed in circumstances that remain unclear in Djébonoua, a town near Bouaké. Several towns in the Gbêkê region were paralyzed by protests."¹³ The situation could have led to mass violence with intercommunity clashes between the Baoulés and members of northern ethnic groups (Dioula). While the violence was soon controlled and limited by police, this event nevertheless made the PDCI and RHDP leaders more entrenched in their opposing positions. The provisional release of Mangoua on March 31, 2020 led to détente, but relations between the PDCI and RHDP are still tense. The warning is therefore still pertinent in the context of efforts to ensure a peaceful election.

- **Scenario C: Supporters of the Unified RHDP (Ouattara) versus supporters of the FPI (Gbagbo).** This scenario remains a concern because the three triggering factors for potential violence have not changed: the issue of former President Laurent Gbagbo's return to Côte d'Ivoire, the ban on Gbagbo's presidential candidacy, and the prosecution of Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire after his return. These factors could still be the source of clashes between supporters of Gbagbo and supporters of the ruling party. We should recall that Gbagbo was acquitted of crimes against humanity on January 15, 2019 by Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court.¹⁴ Following the appeal of this decision by the prosecution, the Appeals Chamber applied several conditions to Gbagbo's release. These conditions were relaxed on May 28, 2020, allowing him to travel to a wider number of countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, with the permission of the Registry of the International Criminal Court.¹⁵ It is hoped that the handling of Gbagbo's return to Côte d'Ivoire takes place with a view toward strengthening peace and reconciliation for a peaceful electoral process.
- **Scenario D: The protests degenerate into riots.** A new scenario that deserves special attention is that of the possible degeneration of political demonstrations into riots. Given the high level of tension between different partisan groups, any protest can easily turn violent. This was the case, for example, in early August 2020 with protests that led to deadly clashes following President Ouattara's announcement of his candidacy for the October 2020 presidential election.¹⁶ It is likely that the rejection of presidential candidacies as well as the proclamation of the election results could lead to violent protests.¹⁷ As depicted in the diagram below, this scenario follows a logic of escalation of violence in which a demonstration leads to a response from the security forces, and this response leads to escalating actions. If not brought under control in time, this chain of actions and reactions can lead to large-scale violent conflicts.

¹³ *Ibid.*

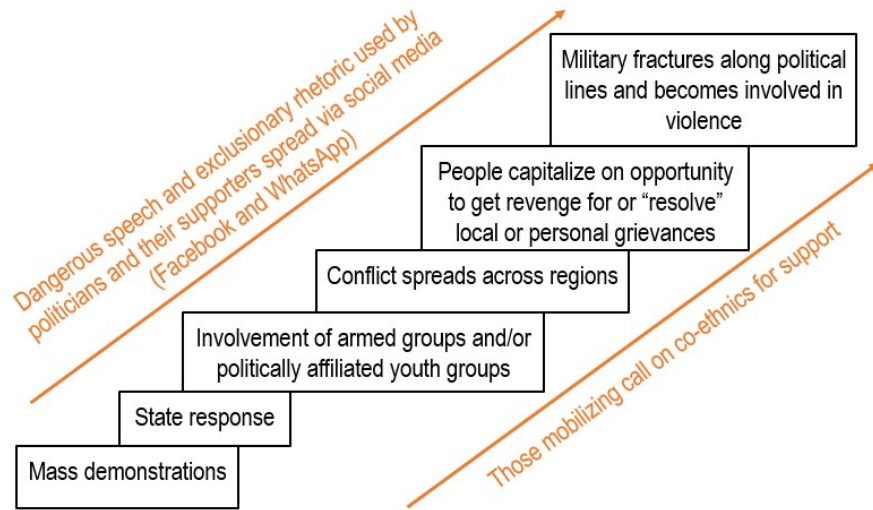
¹⁴ See the International Criminal Court's press release of January 15, 2019: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=pr1427&ln=fr>.

¹⁵ See the International Criminal Court's press release of May 28, 2020: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=pr1524&ln=fr>.

¹⁶ Cf. AFP/VOA, « Quatre Ivoiriens morts lors des manifestations contre le 3e mandat de Ouattara », 13 août 2020, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/des-morts-dans-les-violences-lors-des-manifestations-contre-le-troisi%C3%A8me-mandat-de-ouattara/5542372.html>.

¹⁷ On September 14, the Constitutional Council published its list of approved candidates. Of 44 applications only four were approved; notable rejections include Soro and Gbagbo. See announcement: DECISION N°CI -2020-EP-009/14-09/CC/SG, 14 September 2020, <https://news.abidjan.net/h/679921.html>.

Overview of a Plausible Mass Atrocity Scenario



In summary, despite changes in the sociopolitical situation, the early warnings that have been in place for over a year by analyzing these likely scenarios still remain fundamental concerns. The current election is not safe from violence and there are still significant tensions between political parties, whose boundaries sometimes seem to subsume ethnic and regional groups.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT SEVEN WEEKS FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

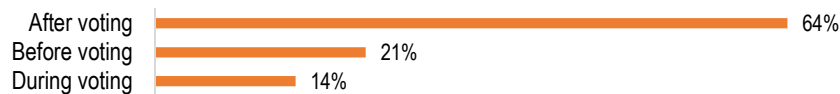
With the election seven weeks away, the political climate seems threatening. To the question "Do you think that the upcoming 2020 presidential election could be affected by violence?" a plurality of those polled (46%) responded "Maybe" while 41% responded "Yes."

Graph 2: Do you think that the upcoming 2020 presidential election could be affected by violence?



Along the same lines, 64% of those polled consider the time after voting, especially the announcement of the results, the riskiest time for violence, while 21% expect to see some violence before voting, and 14% think that violence could happen on election day.

Graph 3: At what stages of the electoral process is potential violence a concern?



These numbers show that efforts to calm this stormy climate must be increased. It is essential to identify the factors that may positively or negatively affect the election. This is not an easy task. The

lack of political dialogue between political parties, the difficulty of achieving compromises around the electoral process, the heightened tensions between political actors, etc., mean that virtually anything could become a potential source of conflict. This is a fragile situation that could either improve or deteriorate.

However, with the October 2020 election seven weeks away, there are certain factors that may be decisive and that should be monitored especially closely. These factors include:

- ***An atmosphere of political competition that is insufficiently democratic:*** Tense political discourse shows that political parties are overtly hostile to each other. Rivals tend to be perceived almost more as enemies than as adversaries, giving the impression of a "winner take all" mentality where losing is unthinkable. Of course, it is legitimate to anticipate winning when involved in a political contest. However, the democratic nature of politics demands that the possibility of losing is also foreseen and that the dignity and rights of the other side are duly respected. With the election seven weeks away, the spirit of democratic competition must be respected by the various political actors in order to expel the spirit of vengeance that has dangerously seeped through some political discourse.
- ***Consensus around the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) still needs to be achieved:*** It is fortunate that the discussion between stakeholders in the presidential election on reforming the IEC has continued, as shown by the use of legal means to resolve this dispute. The new decision by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights of July 15, 2020 on reforming the IEC¹⁸ has not resolved the dispute, but skillfully calls on the various actors to continue political dialogue from less ideological standpoints. A quick compromise should be reached on the issue of local IECs.¹⁹ The same is true for the other election standards issues, about which viable compromises should be reached before the voting period begins.²⁰
- ***President Ouattara's candidacy in the upcoming election:*** The death of Amadou Gon Coulibaly, prime minister and the RHDP's presidential candidate, on July 8, 2020 shook up the political and electoral landscape and led President Ouattara to reverse his decision not to seek a third term.²¹ It is certain that President Ouattara's announcement of his candidacy for president on August 6, 2020, which referred to a "case of force majeure,"²² is not likely to make the election any more peaceful, as shown by the numerous protests throughout the country, which have already resulted in some deaths.²³ The election has reached a delicate stage and urgent action is necessary to reduce tensions before the voting period begins.
- ***The date of the first round of voting on October 31, 2020:*** With the election seven weeks away, there are still questions about the planned date of October 31. Although the IEC seems not to be concerned about the logistics of the election in October,²⁴ there are increasing demands in civil society and from the political parties to postpone the election to a later date. As Mr. Gaudet,

¹⁸ See the press release from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights: <https://news.abidjan.net/h/676400.html>. Accessed July 30, 2020.

¹⁹ Georges-Armand Ouégnin, "Réforme de la CEI, l'opposition exige la dissolution de toutes les commissions locales," published July 24, 2020: <https://www.7info.ci/reforme-de-la-cei-lopposition-exige-la-dissolution-de-toutes-les-commissions-locales/>. Accessed August 5, 2020.

²⁰ Some of the election standards up for discussion are: the issue of sponsoring candidates, the voter registry, the conditions for approving candidacy, especially for those who have declared their candidacy but are brought before the court, etc.

²¹ See the President's address on the state of the nation, Yamoussoukro, March 5, 2020. Accessible at: <http://www.gouv.ci/doc/1583420766adresse-du-president-aalassane-ouattara-sur-l-etat-de-la-nation-yamoussoukro-le-jeudi-05-mars-2020.pdf>. Consulted July 25, 2020.

²² See President Ouattara's speech to the nation on August 6, 2020: <https://news.abidjan.net/h/677747.html>. Consulted August 7, 2020.

²³ AFP/VOA, "Quatre Ivoiriens morts lors des manifestations contre le 3e mandat de Ouattara," August 13, 2020: <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/des-morts-dans-les-violences-lors-des-manifestations-contre-le-troisi%C3%A8me-mandat-de-ouattara/5542372.html>. Consulted August 14, 2020.

²⁴ See the interview of June 29, 2020 with Alain Dogou, 2nd Vice-President of the IEC in charge of logistics, computer technology, and security.

President of the Fondation Ivoirienne pour les Droits de l'Homme et la Vie Politique [Ivorian Foundation for Human Rights and Political Life] (FIDHOP), observes: "Postponing the presidential election will allow all parties to agree in advance on the powers and composition of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), to agree on the election laws, and above all to do a thorough clean-up of the voter rolls in order to remove all non-Ivoriens."²⁵ The PDCI has also called for postponing the election, citing "a tense political climate in Côte d'Ivoire."²⁶ In his speech to the nation on August 6, 2020, President Ouattara maintained the date of October 31, 2020. It is important that a consensus be reached on whether or not the election date will be postponed in order to reduce tensions around the election process and to reassure all stakeholders.

- ***The impact of COVID-19 on the election:*** This is difficult to evaluate, but it is certain that COVID-19 has negatively affected the electoral process. For example, the pandemic led the President of the Republic to change the election laws by Executive Order, as explained by the Secretary General of the Office of the President on March 19, 2020.²⁷ The pandemic has restricted the movements and meetings of political parties and civil society organizations. It is hoped, however, that social distancing measures and the fear of COVID-19 will not affect the voter participation rate. There must be communication and awareness-raising on this subject in order to find appropriate protective measures to ensure better voter participation.

In summary, with the first round of elections on October 31, seven weeks away, there are still several points that require advance agreement of stakeholders. It is therefore necessary to find voices and methods for restarting or increasing political dialogue between the various actors in order to ensure a peaceful electoral process.

WHAT THE VARIOUS ACTORS ARE DOING TO ENSURE A PEACEFUL ELECTORAL PROCESS

It is not easy to draw up a list of the actions and strategies of various actors for ensuring a peaceful presidential election. Some organizations preferred to be discreet about their election-related activities; others did not wish to reveal their programs before their launch a few weeks before the election campaign; and others are still seeking funding or waiting for confirmation of funding for awareness-raising activities around the election. Below is a list of the data that we have been able to collect.

Ivorian Government Initiatives

As the government is a complex organization with many agencies, our intention is not to list what each agency is doing or plans to do for a peaceful election. Instead, this report will point out some initiatives that contribute to ensuring peaceful elections as perceived by the interviewees. The following actions should be noted:

- ***Initiating a political dialogue in January and February 2020:*** This initiative, which brought together the government, opposition parties, and civil society organizations, was seen as valuable by several organizations. The political dialogue should smooth out inter-party relations and encourage and provide a venue for them to reach compromises on various stumbling blocks. However, several actors regret that it was suddenly interrupted without agreement having been reached on any point.²⁸ Although the dialogue between the government and the opposition was not

²⁵ See interview with Mr. Gaudet of 7/7/2020 accessible at <https://aip.ci/cote-divoire-aip-la-fidhop-exhorte-a-un-report-de-lelection-presidentielle/>. Accessed August 2, 2020.

²⁶ See interview with Jean-Louis Billon on VOA Afrique July 23, 2020: <https://www.voaafricque.com/a/c%C3%B4te-d-ivoire-vers-un-report-de-la-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-du-31-octobre-/5515231.html>. Consulted August 2, 2020.

²⁷ See the statement by the Secretary General of the Office of the President of March 19, 2020: <https://www.rti.ci/info/4-economie-info-economie-info/politique/26665/la-loi-portant-modification-de-la-constitution-ivoirienne-promulgee-par-le-president-ouattara>. Consulted August 2, 2020.

²⁸ See BBC, "Enlèvement du dialogue politique en Côte d'Ivoire," published February 19, 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-51555208>. Consulted August 2, 2020.

definitively broken off, as can be seen in the daily press, it is important to create a formal framework for dialogue between election stakeholders.

- ***The reform of the IEC:*** The government agreed to demands by political parties and civil society organizations to reform the IEC. However, the reform did not receive unanimous support, as shown by the case before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which issued a new decision on July 15, 2020.²⁹ Following this decision, the Ivorian political opposition now demands that all the local electoral commissions of the IEC be dissolved in preparation for organizing new elections.³⁰ The fact that the PDCI was recently able to join the central commission of the IEC following "an order of the President modifying the law on the IEC in order to allow seats on this commission to be assigned to opposition parties with the most significant representation in Parliament" indicates significant progress and should be commended. Initiatives such as this that strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of the IEC should be encouraged.
- ***Communication by the IEC:*** It is heartening to observe that most of those interviewed about the IEC appreciate its efforts to communicate with election stakeholders and with the population as a whole at each stage of the electoral process. For example, the IEC's communications on voter registration were extensive, although the registration process experienced several restrictions insofar as some people were not able to register for various reasons. It is important for the IEC to continue communicating effectively with election stakeholders.
- ***Election security:*** Police and security forces are trained to ensure safety during elections. This effort should be commended and can reassure voters, considering that Côte d'Ivoire is susceptible to terrorist attacks, as happened at the border post of Kafolo in the far north of Côte d'Ivoire on June 11, 2020.³¹

In addition to the actions mentioned above, the government should provide additional communication regarding the various actions that are underway or are planned in order to ensure a peaceful electoral process. This could help reduce fears of violent disruptions that could take place during the elections.

Political Party Initiatives

Political parties' actions to ensure a peaceful electoral process are, at best, little known, and, at worst, non-existent, according to several of those interviewed. In fact, interviews with civil society organizations and financial and technical partners show that they are unaware of any activities by political parties to prevent election violence. On the contrary, political parties — both the ruling party and opposition parties — are seen as potential sources of violence, especially regarding political hate speech and undemocratic practices. However, it should be noted that the use of legal means to resolve the dispute over the IEC is a good way for the political parties to encourage a peaceful election.

There is an urgent need for the political parties to publicly indicate their desire for peaceful elections by signing and enforcing a code of appropriate conduct and by including the democratic values of respect for dignity and human rights in their public speeches and their actions. Internal censure of their members (even prominent ones) for any language or action that threatens social cohesion would be a good approach for political parties to provide credible evidence of their desire for peaceful elections.

²⁹ See the statement by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights: <https://news.abidjan.net/h/676400.html>. Accessed July 30, 2020.

³⁰ Jean Kelly Kouassi, "Réforme de la CEI: PDCI-RDA et opposition vent debout contre Ouattara," published July 25, 2020 at: <https://www.afrique-sur7.fr/442035-pdci-opposition-contraindre-ouattara-cei>. Consulted July 30, 2020.

³¹ Thirteen soldiers lost their lives in the terrorist attack on Kafolo: <https://news.abidjan.net/h/675415.html>. Consulted July 30, 2020.

Civil Society Initiatives

a) *Civil Society Organizations*

Civil society organizations have a varied list of actions to ensure peaceful elections. Some examples are given below:

- ***Participating in the reform of election laws:*** Civil society organizations played an active role in the reform and establishment of election standards. It should be recalled that it was the NGO Actions pour la Protection des Droits Humains [Actions for Protecting Human Rights] (APDH) that filed suit on July 12, 2014 with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights against the government of Côte d'Ivoire regarding the unbalanced composition of the members of the IEC. The court issued a decision in the organization's favor on November 18, 2016.³² Today, civil society organizations continue to play an essential role in reforming election standards.
- ***Participating in election management:*** In the IEC's new central commission as determined by the government on July 3, 2019,³³ six of the 15 seats on the commission are assigned to representatives of civil society.³⁴ In this way, civil society organizations are involved in the IEC's activities and participate in making and implementing proposals.³⁵ For example, several organizations received grants from the IEC to raise voter awareness and support voter registration.³⁶ The presence of civil society organizations within election management agencies helps to strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of these agencies, which can encourage peaceful elections.
- ***Raising awareness of social cohesion and maintaining peace during elections:*** Mainly through funding from international organizations, some civil society organizations received grants to conduct awareness-raising activities regarding social cohesion and maintaining peace in various towns across the country. In Côte d'Ivoire, there are several NGOs that have expertise in peace education. This is the legacy of several trainings that took place during conflict and post-conflict periods between 2002 and 2015. Thus, as the elections approach and are perceived as a delicate period that could lead to violence, NGOs have been active in defusing potential conflicts through many awareness-raising activities.³⁷
- ***Civic and voter education:*** Several NGOs are involved in informing voters and preparing them to fully participate in the elections.³⁸ For example, discussions and information activities on election standards took place in Abidjan, particularly regarding the need to reform the IEC, among other topics.³⁹ NGOs also held information sessions about current election issues, the

³² Benoit Hili, "Réforme électorale: L'Apdh, la Cour africaine et la CEI," <https://www.fratmat.info/article/91627/60/reforme-electorale-l-apdh-la-cour-africaine-et-la-cei>. Consulted July 20, 2020.

³³ See the statement by the Council of Ministers on July 3, 2019: http://www.gouv.ci/_actualite-article.php?d=1&recordID=10217. Consulted July 5, 2020.

³⁴ These are representatives of civil society organizations that are involved in the electoral field. See the list of these organizations at: <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-49837371>. Consulted August 10, 2020.

³⁵ Karine Kamatari, "Côte d'Ivoire: voici le point de la rencontre entre la CEI et la société civile," published May 7, 2020, <https://www.yecllo.com/cote-divoire-rencontre-entre-la-cei-et-la-societe-civile>. Consulted August 4, 2020.

³⁶ Interview with WANEP-CI, June 22 2020.

³⁷ For example, see Jean Bavane Kouika, "Réconciliation et paix en Côte d'Ivoire: Un mémorandum citoyen pour la cohésion sociale," in [Fratmat.info](https://www.fratmat.info/article/202418/Politique/reconciliation-et-paix-en-cote-divoire--un-memorandum-citoyen-pour-la-cohesion-sociale), March 5, 2020, <https://www.fratmat.info/article/202418/Politique/reconciliation-et-paix-en-cote-divoire--un-memorandum-citoyen-pour-la-cohesion-sociale> (consulted June 5, 2020); communications team of the NGO ESC, "Elections 2020: L'ONG "Elections Sans Contestation" entend initier des actions pour endiguer la violence," in [Fratmat.info](https://www.fratmat.info/article/83086/60/elections-2020-l-ong-elections-sans-contestation-entend-initier-des-actions-pour-endiguer-la-violence), April 12, 2018, <https://www.fratmat.info/article/83086/60/elections-2020-l-ong-elections-sans-contestation-entend-initier-des-actions-pour-endiguer-la-violence> (consulted June 5, 2020).

³⁸ C. Dallet, "Élections: Des propositions pour des joutes apaisées en 2020," [Fratmat.info](https://www.fratmat.info/article/86209/60/elections-des-propositions-pour-des-joutes-apaisees-en-2020), November 2018, <https://www.fratmat.info/article/86209/60/elections-des-propositions-pour-des-joutes-apaisees-en-2020>; consulted June 5, 2020.

³⁹ See the constructive and inclusive discussion between the IEC and civil society on the status of election preparations and the methods for updating the voter rolls:

political rights of citizens,⁴⁰ the candidates' and political parties' social programs,⁴¹ etc. All these initiatives have contributed to voter education and encouraged responsible behavior during the elections.⁴²

- **Advocacy:** Several advocacy initiatives are underway to encourage stakeholders in the election to behave in a peaceful and democratic manner.⁴³ For example, the civil society organizations that belong to the Groupe de Plaidoyer et d'Actions pour une Transparence Electorale [Advocacy and Action Group for Electoral Transparency] (GPATE) and the Réseau des Acteurs Ivoiriens des Droits Humains [Network of Ivorian Actors for Human Rights] (RAIDH) launched an advocacy initiative in January 2018 for reforming the election laws in order to have transparent and inclusive elections.⁴⁴ Several NGOs in coalitions such as "Coalition Tournons la Page" [Turn the Page Coalition] or "Coalition Ça Suffit [That's Enough Coalition] launched an advocacy action against the possibility of a third term for President Ouattara.⁴⁵ These various advocacy actions are intended to help improve the election climate to ensure a peaceful electoral process.
- **Observing elections and monitoring election violence:** Civil society organization platforms such as POECI (Plateforme des Organisations de la Société Civile pour l'Observation des Elections en Côte d'Ivoire) [Platform for Civil Society Organizations to Observe Elections in Côte d'Ivoire] will participate in observing the elections. This provides a viewpoint on voting operations that is different from that of the political parties. It can also contribute to strengthening the credibility of election results if civil society remains non-partisan.⁴⁶ Moreover, some civil society organizations such as WANEP-CI are engaged in monitoring election violence by documenting it⁴⁷ in order to avoid false information that could increase election violence.⁴⁸

Graph 4 has a breakdown of the kinds of activities carried out by civil society organizations to encourage peaceful elections. We see that 92% of civil society organizations interviewed are involved in civic and voter education; 76% in promoting social cohesion around the electoral process; 59% work with the IEC on various tasks around holding elections; 32% are involved in activities that have to do with reforming election standards; and so on.

https://www.ci.undp.org/content/cote_divoire/fr/home/presscenter/pressreleases/debat-constructif-et-inclusif-entre-la-cei-et-la-societe-civile.html; consulted August 11, 2020.

⁴⁰ See the project funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and carried out by WANEP-CI called "La société civile engagée et mobilisée pour des élections pacifiques et crédibles en Côte d'Ivoire en 2020"; see the press conference on the launch of this program: Job, "Processus électoral de 2020: la Société civile réclame suffisamment de temps pour que les acteurs comprennent bien les textes," on Abidjan.net, March 5, 2020, <https://news.abidjan.net/h/670032.html>; consulted June 6, 2020.

⁴¹ See CIVIS-CI's campaign on the 2020 presidential candidates' social programs. See the statement on the project launch: Issiaka N'Guessan, "Des projets de société cohérents comme condition pour voter les candidats aux élections de 2020," 7info.ci, January 29, 2020, <https://www.7info.ci/des-projets-de-societe-coherents-comme-condition-pour-voter-les-candidats-aux-elections-de-2020/>. Consulted June 6, 2020.

⁴² See the interviews and research workshop held at CERAP on July 23, 2020.

⁴³ Idem.

⁴⁴ See RTI, "Des organisations de la société civile proposent une réforme de la CEI et du code électoral," <https://www.rti.ci/info/Politique/21056/sport.html>; consulted June 2, 2020.

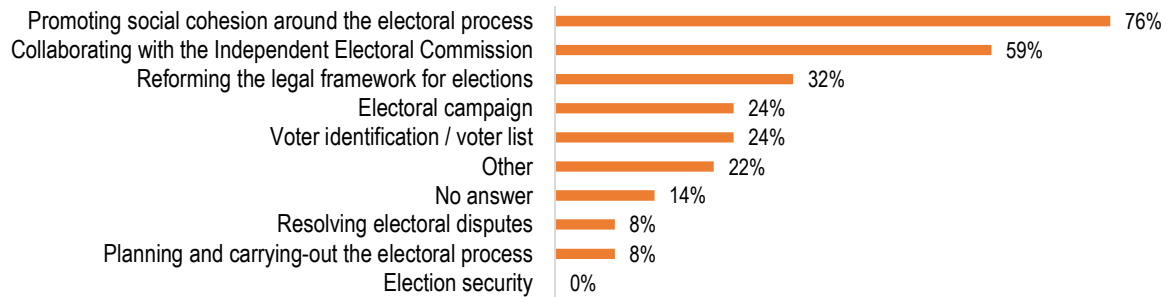
⁴⁵ Civil society organizations started an online petition on July 23, 2020 demanding that President Alassane Ouattara not seek a third term as president: <https://www.afriksoir.net/cote-ivoire-organisations-societe-civile-lancent-petition-contre-eventuel-troisieme-mandat-de-ouattara/>; consulted August 2, 2020.

⁴⁶ See the interviews and research workshop held at CERAP on July 23, 2020.

⁴⁷ See CERAP and UC Berkeley, "Lancement du projet d'étude sur la pacification des élections en Côte d'Ivoire en 2020," <http://cerap-inades.org/index.php/component/k2/item/81-cerap-universite-de-californie-lancement-du-projet-d-etude-sur-la-pacification-des-elections-en-cote-d-ivoire-en-2020>; consulted May 26, 2020. See also APA, "La société civile prépare des élections sans violence et sans armes en Côte d'Ivoire," atoo.ci, <http://www.atoo.ci/2020/01/28/la-societe-civile-prepare-des-elections-sans-violence-et-sans-armes-en-cote-divoire>; consulted June 7, 2020.

⁴⁸ See also the interview with WANEP-CI on June 22, 2020.

Graph 4: In what area(s) is your organization active?



b) Religious and Traditional Leaders

Within civil society, we should note the important and quiet work of traditional and religious leaders to ensure peaceful presidential elections in 2020. Several traditional and religious leaders use various kinds of gatherings and the platform granted to them to send messages of peace and calls for tolerance and non-violence during this election period. For example, the Catholic Church organized prayers for peaceful elections in February 2020.⁴⁹ Catholic bishops published two pastoral letters on peaceful elections, in addition to many statements on the political situation during this election year.⁵⁰ On August 31, 2020, the Archbishop of Abidjan, Cardinal Jean-Pierre Kutwa, published a "Call for respect for the law in consultation," in which he calls for respect for the law and reconciliation before presidential election.⁵¹ Protestant and Evangelical churches have also been involved and engaged in raising awareness about peaceful elections among their congregations.⁵² The Muslim community also organized prayers and actions for peaceful elections.⁵³

In addition to raising awareness in their congregations, traditional and religious leaders have also sometimes questioned political leaders about the need to ensure a peaceful political climate before the election. This direct dialogue should increase, although it seems to be unappreciated by some political authorities, as seen by government reactions to the canceled Catholic march on February 15, 2020⁵⁴ or the reaction to Cardinal Kutwa's appeal by Minister Kobenan Kouassi Adjoumani, spokesperson for RHDP.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ See the Mass for Peace of February 15, 2020: "À Abidjan, les catholiques prient pour des élections apaisées," in Vatican News, February 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/fr/eglise/news/2020-02/cote-d-ivoire-abidjan-rassemblement-catholiques-paix-elections.html>. Consulted August 2, 2020.

⁵⁰ See "Message des évêques pour des élections transparentes, justes et ouvertes, en vue de la réconciliation et de la paix" of January 19, 2020 at <http://eglisecatholique.ci/news/140/46/114%C3%A8me-Assembl%C3%A9e-pl%C3%A9ni%C3%A8re-message-des-vevques-pour-des-%c3%89lections-transparentes-justes-et-ouvertes-en-vue-de-la-reconciliation-et-de-la-paix/d,det-declaration.html>. See also the pastoral letter published on July 21, 2020 titled: "L'Église en Côte d'Ivoire au service de la réconciliation de la justice et de la paix."

⁵¹ Jean-Pierre Cardinal Kutwa, « Appel au respect du droit dans la concertation » du 31 août 2020, <http://www.eglisecatholique.ci/news/190/34/appel-au-respect-du-droit-dans-la-concertation/d,det-actu.html> ; consulté le 02 septembre 2020.

⁵² See Saint Bénifils, "Côte d'Ivoire: Le consistoire des Protestants Évangéliques interpelle les autorités ivoiriennes sur le danger qui guette l'année électorale" on Radio Centre-Ville, February 22, 2020: <https://radio-centreville.com/cote-divoire-le-consistoire-des-protestants-evangeliques-interpelle-les-autorites-ivoiriennes-sur-le-danger-qui-guette-lannee-electorale/>. Consulted August 2, 2020.

⁵³ See M. Ismaila, "Élections apaisées en Côte d'Ivoire: Les musulmans mourides organisent des prières samedi 22 février 2020," in *L'Intelligent d'Abidjan*, February 22, 2020, <https://www.lintelligentdabidjan.info/news/elections-apaisees-en-cote-divoire-les-musulmans-mourides-organisent-des-prieres-samedi-22-fevrier-2020/>. Consulted August 2, 2020.

⁵⁴ André Silver Konan, "Côte d'Ivoire: pourquoi l'Église catholique a renoncé à sa marche du 15 février," published January 29, 2020: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/887825/politique/cote-divoire-pourquoi-leglise-catholique-a-renonce-a-sa-marche-du-15-fevrier>. Consulted August 10, 2020.

⁵⁵ See the response of Ministre Kobenan Kouassi Adjoumani at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-2S0J5jXXw> ; consulté le 02 septembre 2020.

Foreign Governments' and International Organizations' Initiatives

Foreign governments and the international organizations that are often called "technical and financial partners" play an important role in supporting the government of Côte d'Ivoire and non-state actors in the electoral process. This support can take on various forms, including but not limited to the following:

- **Funding election activities:** Through its Basket Fund, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) collects contributions from development partners to support the organization of the 2020 presidential election. With this aim, the government and the UNDP signed an agreement for an Election Support Program in Côte d'Ivoire on January 30, 2020. The primary objective is to support the IEC in holding credible, peaceful, democratic elections.⁵⁶ For example,⁵⁷ as part of this project, Japan promised to contribute one billion CFA francs on June 15, 2020,⁵⁸ and the Federal Republic of Germany contributed €500,000 to the Basket Fund on June 19, 2020,⁵⁹ France contributed 131 million CFA francs on August 4, 2020,⁶⁰ etc.

It is important to note that most NGOs and other civil society organizations essentially depend on funding from foreign governments and international organizations to launch various programs for a peaceful electoral process through awareness-raising campaigns, training workshops, and establishing monitoring committees.⁶¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly reduced funding for NGOs, especially for awareness-raising activities.

- **Technical support and training on democratic issues in general and election issues in particular:** In addition to grants, several technical and financial partners offer various trainings and apply their expertise to capacity building for political actors, civil society organizations, and election management agencies, in addition to setting up an inclusive political dialogue in order to promote peace. For example, this is the case with the Political Transition and Inclusion program (PTI) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) at a cost of five billion CFA francs for a four-year period (2018-2022). This program "aims to support the efforts of the Ivorian government to promote an inclusive political dialogue, encourage significant participation by young people and women in the political system, and strengthen social cohesion."⁶² In fact, most technical and financial partners support initiatives that are directly linked to the election process and which are described on their websites.
- **Election observation:** Although the list of accredited organizations observing the election is not yet available, it is certain that several international institutions will fund local and international observers and will participate directly in observing elections. The Ivorian

⁵⁶ IEC, "Processus électoral – Un projet d'appui aux élections signé avec le PNUD," February 3, 2020, <https://cei.ci/processus-electoral-un-projet-dappui-aux-elections-signé-avec-le-pnud/>. Consulted August 5, 2020.

⁵⁷ This is not a complete list of Basket Fund contributors.

⁵⁸ Marc Innocent, "Appui au processus électoral: Le Japon promet un financement de plus d'un milliard," June 17, 2020, <https://news.abidjan.net/h/674814.html>. Consulted August 5, 2020.

⁵⁹ See the UNDP's press release of June 20, 2020: "La République Fédérale d'Allemagne apporte une contribution de 500 mille Euro au basket fund du PNUD pour soutenir l'organisation d'élection transparente, inclusive et apaisée en Côte d'Ivoire," https://www.ci.undp.org/content/cote_divoire/fr/home/presscenter/pressreleases/la-republique-federale-dallemagne-apporte-une-contribution-de-50.html. Consulted August 5, 2020.

⁶⁰ Donatien Kautcha, "Côte d'Ivoire: Présidentielle, la France apporte une contribution de 131 millions FCFA pour renforcer le mécanisme des résultats des votes," published August 5, 2020; https://www.koaci.com/article/2020/08/05/cote-divoire/politique/cote-divoire-presidentielle-la-france-apporte-une-contribution-de-131-millions-fcfa-pour-renforcer-le-mecanisme-des-resultats-des-votes_143756.html. Consulted August 5, 2020.

⁶¹ See interviews and research workshop held at CERAP on July 23, 2020.

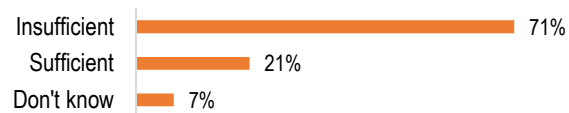
⁶² See the press release on the launch of the Political Transition and Inclusion program in Côte d'Ivoire, February 8, 2019, <https://aip.ci/ndi-lance-le-programme-transition-et-inclusion-politiques-en-cote-divoire/>. Consulted June 6, 2020.

government has already invited the European Union to observe the elections, according to Ambassador Jobst Von Kirchmann, head of the EU delegation in Côte d'Ivoire.⁶³

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF MEASURES AND INITIATIVES TO ENSURE A PEACEFUL ELECTORAL PROCESS

It is hard to evaluate the potential impact of the actions of the various actors for peaceful presidential elections in 2020. However, as shown by the results of our survey in Graph 5, when asked "What do you think of the potential impact of the measures and initiatives implemented by various actors to ensure peaceful elections in October 2020?" only 21% of those polled are confident that the efforts currently underway will be adequate to prevent potential election violence. The majority of those polled (71%) think that the measures and efforts currently underway are inadequate to prevent or contain potential violence. This shows that the fear of election violence is great and that additional efforts are needed to reassure the population.

Graph 5: What do you think of the potential impact of the measures and initiatives implemented by various actors to ensure peaceful elections in October...



CONCLUSION

Election violence is not inevitable. The various stakeholders are free to choose peace or violence, to decide to settle their differences either through legal and institutional means or by other channels that are not regulated by law and can lead to violence. The political class will play a key role in whether this is a peaceful election or not. It can embrace peace or inflammatory rhetoric. This is a delicate and uncertain situation that calls for the rejection of both the optimists who predict that everything will be fine and the pessimists who anticipate the worst. An objective reading of the current situation indicates that anything can happen; nothing can be excluded as a possibility. The outcome is not pre-determined, but will result from strategic interactions between political actors and their ability to build compromises around potential stumbling blocks. However, the current pre-election crisis and the demonstrations which have already resulted in loss of human life and destruction of property constitute a serious alert for potential violence surrounding the electoral process. The government of Côte d'Ivoire as well as the international community, political parties, civil society organizations, the media, and all bodies of the Ivorian population will have to mobilize by taking concrete actions to consolidate peace and social cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Gouvernement of Côte d'Ivoire

- If the conditions cannot be met to ensure a peaceful electoral process, the government should consider options for postponing the election date, which is currently scheduled for October 31, 2020. All stakeholders do not currently agree on the election date, and given the high level of tension between political actors and the violent protests during this pre-election period, a

⁶³ Apanews, "L'UE conditionne l'envoi d'observateurs électoraux en Côte d'Ivoire après une mission d'évaluation en juin," published March 11, 2020, <https://www.2020.ci/index.php/actu-2020/politique/lue-conditionne-lenvoi-dobservateurs-electoraux-en-cote-divoire-apres-une>. Consulted June 9, 2020.

postponement may be a lesser evil when weighed against the legal issues postponing would raise.

- Organize a political dialogue with all the forces of the nation in order to strengthen reconciliation before the election.
- Allow major candidates to participate in the election by favoring a political approach and compromise-building in order to safeguard peace. The rejection of the candidacy of certain candidates who have been convicted of the courts could further threaten the already tense pre-electoral climate.
- Publicly strengthen the government's commitment to work for peaceful, credible, and free elections and call on all political parties and candidates to do the same. Clearly state that all Ivorians, including security forces, government officials, and journalists will be held liable in cases of inciting, aiding and abetting, or committing atrocity crimes, according to the penal code of Côte d'Ivoire.
- Develop a governmental plan and commit public resources to implementing civic education programs that explain the electoral process and the legal means available for contesting election results.
- Train security forces in election security issues and shared objectives, emphasizing their mission to defend and protect the people of Côte d'Ivoire and stressing the importance of the impartiality of a professional army. This training could help the army and police officers to maintain a professional attitude during the election. Especially in areas that are susceptible to land conflicts, such training initiatives would allow security forces to contain a potential increase in lethal violence.
- Support and do not limit observation of elections by credible and independent Ivorians and invite observers from the African Union (AU) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to observe the election throughout the country and throughout the voting process. To ensure peace and security, all participants must strive for a credible process and be aware that any irregularities will be reported.

To Leaders of Political Parties

- Break away from the "win or win" logic and approach the election with a democratic spirit. Respect the dignity and rights of political opponents rather than perceiving and speaking of them as enemies.
- Inform supporters that violence is unacceptable and publicly commit to using established procedures to contest election results.
- Organize public debates among political leaders, focused on their political programs in a respectful and democratic manner. This can serve as an example to their supporters who would be tempted to use violent means to settle their differences.
- Engage in dialogue with other parties to agree on codes of conduct, to set up internal protocols and guarantees, and to take appropriate measures for legislative and parliamentary monitoring to protect the integrity of the election process from disinformation campaigns. The heads of political parties should come together to sign an official code of conduct in public, thus making a public commitment and demonstrating to their supporters that they reject violence and encourage credible and transparent elections.

To Civil Society

- **Civil society organizations for peacebuilding** should launch atrocity prevention programs, especially relating to social cohesion, early tracking of violence, violence reduction, and dialogue with youth, during the remaining weeks leading to the election to ensure an impact on preventing atrocity crimes linked to elections.
- **Civil society organizations for peacebuilding and election planning** should focus on civic education, the roles and responsibilities of political actors, and awareness-raising campaigns regarding elections and the electoral process. These programs could include voter education, monitoring, and conflict mediation. Some programs could especially focus on women and on young people, and on ethnic associations that risk becoming involved in violent confrontations.
- **Civil society organizations for peacebuilding** should involve **local and religious leaders and other community leaders** in condemning hate speech, spreading messages of peace, holding political actors responsible for any incitement to violence or support of violence, raising awareness about the electoral process, and creating or expanding mediation initiatives for community grievances. Resolving local conflicts before the elections could reduce the overall risk of violence against civilians.
- **Local and religious leaders and other community leaders** should rely on the established traditions of religious tolerance and diversity to spread messages of national and religious brotherhood and to preach peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- **Business leaders**, who have significant interest in maintaining stability in Côte d'Ivoire, should publicly call on political leaders to commit to non-violence and to support local activities to promote peace.

To Foreign Governments and International Organizations in Côte d'Ivoire

- **Foreign governments** should hold a high-level forum with the heads of all political parties to restore dialogue. Organized by countries that leaders of Côte d'Ivoire welcome and respect, it would bring together political leaders so that they can build a compromise on divisive issues before the election.
- **Foreign governments and the United Nations** should be ready to threaten targeted sanctions to dissuade those who seek to incite violence. Targeted sanctions will be most effective (1) when foreign actors work multilaterally and communicate their determination to apply sanctions that are early, constant, gradual, and aggressive, thus isolating the targeted behavior and (2) when foreign actors apply sanctions in coordination with sustained multilateral diplomacy and a coherent wider strategy.
- **Foreign governments, the United Nations, and international NGOs** should increase regular monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses and risk indicators for violence in Côte d'Ivoire. Some international NGOs that are already on site have violence warning systems that could be supported or used to inform actions on an international scale.
- **Foreign governments, the United Nations, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU)** should condemn any observed restrictions of freedom of speech, incitations to violence, hate speech, arming of youth, or any other high-risk incident immediately, should they occur, and prepare solutions to dissuade or punish such actions.

- **Foreign governments, the United Nations, and ECOWAS and African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) of the AU** should develop an emergency plan to put a rapid end to mass atrocities in case preventive measures should fail.

To the Media

- **Traditional media (print, radio, television)** should demand and offer all staff trainings on journalistic standards, disinformation, and dangerous speech. Working with international organizations, media groups should offer trainings showing that responsible journalism can contribute to a peaceful electoral process.
- **Social media companies (Facebook and WhatsApp)** are the most popular social media and messaging platforms in the country) should hire more French-speaking employees and plan to hire local staff in Côte d'Ivoire to make sure that dangerous speech and disinformation do not exacerbate violence. These companies should work together, in partnership with researchers and hate speech experts in the country, in order to identify and combat these dangerous tendencies before, during, and after the election.