



Statement of Findings and Recommendations IRI Pre-Election Assessment Mission to Côte d'Ivoire

Abidjan, September 26, 2025

I. Executive Summary

The 2025 presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire arrives at a pivotal moment for the country, which stands as a regional economic power amid the rising influence of the Alliance des États du Sahel (AES) and a growing terrorism threat in the region. The Ivorian people seek a peaceful and transparent electoral process that maintains stability, but many fear a repeat of the violence that marked previous election cycles and claimed numerous lives.

To demonstrate international support for a credible electoral process, the International Republican Institute (IRI) deployed a pre-election assessment mission to Côte d'Ivoire from September 22 to 26, 2025. The mission was led by a delegation of experts who evaluated the electoral environment ahead of the October 25 presidential election. This statement presents the delegation's findings and offers key recommendations to the government, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), political parties, and civil society to help ensure a fair, transparent, and credible process that reflects the will of Ivorians.

This high-level delegation was led by IRI President Dr. Daniel Twining and IRI Board Member Ms. Dana White, who arrived in Abidjan on September 22 and met with over 70 stakeholders including representatives from the CEI, Constitutional Council, Ministry of Interior and Security, political parties, and civil society organizations from across the Ivorian political spectrum.

The delegation thanks all stakeholders for taking time to meet with the mission and for the fruitful discussions. The delegation also commends the efforts and level of preparation of the CEI to ensure a logistically and technically well-organized election.

However, the mission identified several critical challenges that, if left unaddressed, could undermine the credibility of the October 2025 presidential election. Key concerns include the disqualification of major candidates due to ineligibility issues or the lack of alternative candidates, which limits competition and voter choice; pervasive voter apathy and disenfranchisement resulting from citizens' inability to register to vote beyond the November 2024 registration period; the inability to audit candidate sponsorship lists, which reduces transparency; reports of harassment and intimidation targeting political party supporters; and the absence of a publicly available electoral calendar, which hampers public oversight. These issues reflect broader concerns about electoral integrity, public mistrust in institutions, and the potential for instability or violence.

Through this statement, the delegation presents an impartial and objective assessment of the current political and electoral environment while offering practical recommendations to enhance citizen confidence in the process, mitigate the potential for electoral violence, and demonstrate international support for Côte d'Ivoire's democracy. The delegation hopes electoral authorities and political parties will strongly consider the findings and recommendations shared in this statement in the lead-up to the October 2025 election.

II. Methodology

IRI is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that advances democracy and freedom worldwide. IRI deployed a team of expert delegates to assess the conditions surrounding Côte d'Ivoire's upcoming elections. The delegation met with over 70 stakeholders — including electoral authorities, political parties, and civil society — to evaluate the political, legal, and security environment for credible elections.

Their assessment focused on election preparedness, potential vulnerabilities, and practical recommendations to strengthen the process, promote peaceful participation, and build public confidence. These findings are presented herein.

IRI began its analysis in early September with the deployment of two Long-Term Analysts (LTAs) who monitor the electoral environment before, during, and after election day. IRI will continue observing through election day and the post-election period. At the conclusion of its assessment, IRI will publish a final report detailing its findings and recommendations.

IRI adheres to the [Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Observers](#) and bases its findings on Ivorian law and international standards. All activities are strictly nonpartisan and grounded in principles of non-interference.

III. Background

The October 2025 presidential election is unfolding against a backdrop of an empowered presidential system, and persistent instability and violence that has marked many presidential elections since 2000. Historic flashpoints include the 2000 and 2010 elections, both of which were marked by deadly violence and mass displacement. The 2020 election, boycotted by opposition parties, saw President Alassane Ouattara secure a third term amid violence and controversy over the interpretation of term limits following a new Constitution that came into effect in 2016.

Now, President Ouattara, who remains the dominant contender and is supported by a well-resourced party apparatus, is seeking a controversial fourth term. While the Constitutional Council cleared five candidates for the election, several major candidates from the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (PDCI-RDA), *Parti des Peuples Africains – Côte d'Ivoire* (PPA-CI), and *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI) — parties that represent significant portions of the electorate — have been disqualified for a variety of reasons, including legal nationality requirements, insufficient or irregular sponsorship

(which they dispute), and past legal convictions. Aggrieved candidates and parties have not been able to dispute their disqualifications as there is no appeal process for rulings from the Constitutional Council. That said, per article 56 of the Electoral Code, candidates were given 72 hours to file observations and claims after the Constitutional Council published the provisional list of candidates.

While Abidjan remains calmer than in past electoral periods, reports of arrests — that some stakeholders have deemed arbitrary — and general concern about historical instability around elections, heighten stakeholders' fears of unrest. To date, in August and September 2025, in response to calls from opposition parties, thousands of Ivorians took to the streets of Abidjan to protest President Ouattara's bid for a fourth term and the disqualification of key opposition figures. Protesters demanded the reinstatement of these candidates on the electoral list.

The CEI is generally viewed as technically competent although some actors regard it as politicized. Its current structure of the Commission — required by the electoral code and possibly the result of inter-party arrangements — increased the CEI to 18 members, which now sits at 16 due to two resignations. Through dialogues, parties were active participants in the past reform of the electoral commission. Nevertheless, parties differ in their views on whether the agreed-upon plan was fully implemented.

While the voter registration process, held from October 19 to November 17, 2024, added 715,006 new voters — an 8.92-percent increase compared to the previous number of registered voters — the overall number of registered voters remains significantly below the estimated eligible population.

Although the information landscape is generally strong, it remains highly polarized. Distorted content and inflammatory rhetoric on social media undermine public understanding of the electoral process—especially among individuals with limited information literacy.

IV. Preliminary Findings

Based on its assessment of the pre-election environment, the delegation has identified five primary areas of concern:

- Limited political competition and voter choice due to the disqualification of major candidates and lack of alternative candidates.
- Voter apathy and disenfranchisement — particularly among newly eligible voters who cannot participate because the voter roll registration period closed in November 2024.
- Lack of transparency in the candidate sponsorship process, which cannot be audited, fuels suspicion of manipulation.
- Reports of harassment and intimidation targeting political party supporters.
- Absence of a publicly available electoral calendar, which obscures the timeline for electoral activities and limits public oversight and accountability.

Political and Campaign Environment

The campaign environment ahead of the October 2025 presidential election is characterized by significant challenges to political competition. The Constitutional Council approved five out of 60 candidates for the presidential election, disqualifying several major opposition figures on legal grounds such as voter roll status, nationality questions, and sponsorship deficiencies. These disqualifications, while grounded in law, are perceived by some as politically motivated and have heightened tensions and triggered protests. The absence of an appeal process further restricts political competition, fuels suspicion of manipulation, and undermines public trust in the legal framework.

The candidate sponsorship review process remains opaque, with limited opportunities for candidates or civil society to observe or challenge findings. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of transparency, which has diminished their confidence in the process.

The CEI, constitutionally mandated to organize elections, includes civil society representatives and has undergone reforms with the agreement of parties. However, some opposition parties have withdrawn from it, citing systemic distrust and dissatisfaction with the way in which the Commission operates. While the CEI is generally viewed as technically competent, accusations of bias and internal conflict persist, and many stakeholders have called for greater consistency in meeting electoral calendar targets.

Voter Participation

Voter participation faces substantial obstacles, beginning with the management of the electoral roll. The voter registration process added 715,006 new voters, bringing the total to 8,727,431 citizens, which was an increase over the prior registration period — still far short of what some stakeholders believe are 12.5 million voting-age citizens. The CEI's decision not to revise the electoral roll in 2025, citing time and resource constraints, has effectively disenfranchised large numbers of newly eligible voters.

Voter registration turnout was below expectations, likely due to both voter apathy and structural issues such as lack of national ID cards or birth certificates. Accusations of duplicate registrations and anomalies in the voter roll further undermine the integrity of the process. The closure of the voter roll in March 2025 means that citizens turning 18 after this date cannot participate in the election. Youth and women remain significantly underrepresented in politics despite legal requirement for a 30-percent quota in decision-making bodies and nominative and elective positions, including for the election of National Assembly members in certain constituencies. The CEI should be commended for its efforts to digitize the registration verification process, but only 65 percent of Ivorians are online, complicating access for many, particularly in rural areas. The distribution of new voter cards is scheduled close to election day, raising concerns about timely collection and participation. Furthermore, a number of stakeholders have also called for greater consistency in meeting electoral calendar targets.

Civil society organizations play a vital role in voter education and election observation. The CEI has launched digital accreditation platforms for CSOs and is providing them with financial support to conduct civic and voter education activities, but concerns remain about the reach and effectiveness of such efforts, especially in rural and underserved communities.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence remains a persistent threat, rooted in Côte d'Ivoire's history of civil conflict and instability during previous elections. The disqualification of prominent opposition leaders and mistrust of institutions have reignited fears of unrest. In August and September 2025, thousands of Ivorians protested in Abidjan against President Ouattara's bid for a fourth term and the disqualification of opposition candidates. These protests were followed by arrests and alleged kidnappings of opposition supporters. A number of those detained have since been released, but some remain in custody.

Reports of harassment and intimidation targeting political party supporters threaten civic engagement and contribute to a climate of fear. Civil society and religious leaders have warned that failure to de-escalate political tensions could lead to violence during the campaign period and after the announcement of the election outcome. The frustration resulting from candidate disqualification and opposition parties' lack of communication regarding their strategies fuel concerns that violence could erupt.

Information Environment

Public suspicion and diminished trust in institutions are fueled by the spread of distorted information and the lack of transparency regarding aspects of the electoral processes, which remains a serious concern as the country approaches the presidential election.

The information environment in Côte d'Ivoire is polarized and fragile, with heavy political party influence over both traditional and digital media. Regulatory bodies such as the National Press Authority and High Authority for Audiovisual Communication routinely suspend outlets and impose sanctions, though this has not yet occurred during the current election period. The 2017 press law protects journalist's sources, but the 2024 electronic communications law criminalizes unauthorized publication of digital content, raising fears that investigative journalism could be stifled.

Perhaps most concerning to stakeholders is social media. They report that false narratives, including AI-generated content, are proliferating on social media, exacerbated by low digital literacy and foreign malign influence — particularly from the AES and possibly Russia-linked networks. The government has launched campaigns to address the digital threat, but external tensions with Sahelian neighbors continue to complicate the digital space. Threats against journalists have escalated, with incidents of harassment, arrests, and deportations, resulting in Côte d'Ivoire's international press freedom ranking declining from 53rd to 64th on Reporters Sans Frontières 2025 index.

V. Recommendations

In the spirit of international cooperation and support for democratic development, the mission offers the following recommendations to enhance the transparency and credibility of the electoral process. IRI acknowledges that some of the recommendations outlined in this statement may not be practical to implement before election day and recognizes that the breadth of challenges facing Côte d'Ivoire's electoral process will require a sustained reform effort over time. Nevertheless, the Ivorian government should strive to achieve those recommendations that are feasible in the short-term, while proactively developing plans to address longer-term reforms and lay the groundwork for credible and representative elections in the future.

Prior to the election:

- **Scale Voter Access and Education:** The CEI, in collaboration with civil society and political parties, should scale up voter and civic education efforts, focusing on timely and equitable distribution of voter registration cards and information about the electoral process.
- **Refrain from Harmful Speech and Electoral Conduct:** All political stakeholders must refrain from inciting or endorsing violence against opponents. Parties should avoid practices such as vote-buying, voter suppression, and ethnic polarization, which risk further intimidating voters and undermining the legitimacy of the process. Additionally, parties should publicly commit to allowing campaigning from opposing parties in their strongholds.
- **Investigate Election-Related Violations and Offenses:** The government should establish a mechanism to report violations or offenses prior to the election, starting with a reporting line at the CEI. The CEI should have the ability to refer such cases to the judiciary to reinforce accountability and the rule of law.
- **Release Detained Party Members:** The government should immediately release all opposition members and supporters who have not been charged in connection with the electoral process. Their continued detention undermines political freedoms, escalates tensions, and threatens the credibility of the election.
- **Combat False Information and Promote Digital Literacy:** The government and civil society should intensify efforts to counter distorted information, especially on social media, and invest in digital literacy programs to help citizens critically assess information sources.
- **Protect Press Freedom:** Authorities should ensure that journalists can operate freely and safely, without fear of harassment, arrest, or deportation. Legal reforms should be considered to safeguard investigative journalism and prevent misuse of laws that could stifle free expression.

- **Ensure Equal Media Access:** The media regulator should guarantee that all parties receive equal access to public media, as required by law, to foster a level playing field during the campaign period. Regulatory bodies should apply sanctions transparently and fairly and ensure that any restrictions on media outlets are justified, proportionate, and consistent with international standards for freedom of expression.
- **Publish Electoral Calendar:** The CEI should make publicly available a detailed electoral calendar outlining all procedural milestones. This calendar is essential for enhancing transparency, enabling public awareness, ensuring accountability, and fostering trust in the electoral process.

Post-election:

- **Improve Candidate Selection Process:** The government should initiate post-election consultation with all stakeholders to codify a dual-step candidacy verification process, enabling disqualified candidates to appeal decisions up to the Constitutional Council. This change, while too late for 2025, should be prioritized in post-election reforms to prevent future potential issues rooted in candidate disqualification.
- **Expand Capacity of Political Parties:** The state should fund organizations to train political parties on the candidate nomination process, increasing party and public confidence in the process.
- **Scale Up Voter Registration:** The government should make significant efforts and dedicate necessary resources to ensure that every citizen receives proper identification documents, including national ID cards, birth certificates, and citizenship certificates, which are prerequisites for voter registration and a major root cause of disenfranchisement.
- **Conduct Annual Updating of the Voter Roll:** Despite legal obligations, the voter roll is not systematically updated, excluding thousands of new 18-year-olds. The CEI should implement annual, automatic roll revisions, ideally coupled with continuous registration options to close the disenfranchisement gap.

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