



IVORY COAST/CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Area: 322,463 sq km

Population: 28,088,455 (July 2021 est.)

Capital: Yamoussoukro (legislative capital), Abidjan (administrative capital).

Ethnic Groups: Akan 28.9%, Voltaic or Gur 16.1%, Northern Mande 14.5%, Kru 8.5%, Southern Mande 6.9%, unspecified 0.9%, non-Ivoirian 24.2% (2014 est.)

Languages: French (official); 60 African languages, of which Dioula, a market language, is the most widely spoken.

Religion: Muslim 42.9%, Catholic 17.2%, Evangelical 11.8%, Methodist 1.7%, other Christian 3.2%, Animist 3.6%, other religions or none 19.2% (2014 est.)

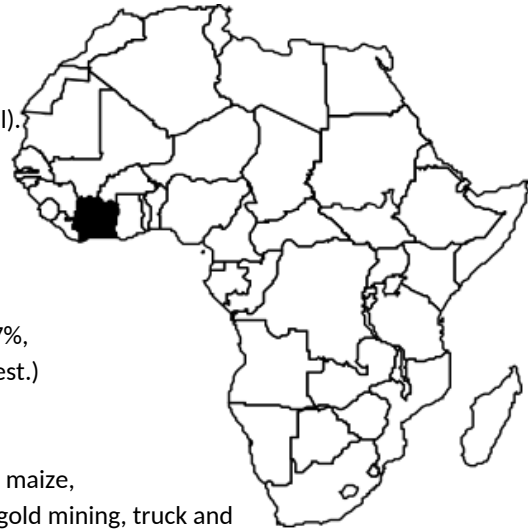
Life Expectancy: 61.8 years (high infant mortality).

Literacy: 89.9% age 15 years and older (UNESCO, 2019)

Economy: yams, cassava, cocoa, oil palm fruit, sugar cane, rice, plantains, maize, cashew nuts, rubber, foodstuffs, beverages; wood products, oil refining, gold mining, truck and bus assembly, textiles, fertilizer, building materials.

Gini (Income Inequality) Index: 41.5 (2015 est.)

Gender Inequality Index: 0.538; Rank 162.



Encounters with the Earliest History

Located in West Africa on the Atlantic's Gulf of Guinea, Ivory Coast/Côte d'Ivoire has had a long history of interaction with regional and global powers. Limited archeological research reveals Neolithic habitation sites with stone and bone tools, as well as early pottery production. Large-scale migrations into the area started in the 13th century (after the fall of the Mali empire) and continued into the 16th century with the invasion of the Songhay empire by Morocco. The northern region built long established commercial ties via the trans-Saharan trade routes engaging in exchanges of commodities such as gold, salt, ivory, cloth, and copper, as well as other goods. The coastal region was called Costa do Marfim by the Portuguese and Côte d'Ivoire by the French, both named for the profitable elephant hunting and ivory trade. Kingdoms and empires such as Asante also held territories in present day Côte d'Ivoire at their height. In the wake of their expansion, some migrants were forced to flee to avoid war or enslavement. One of the royal migrants was Awura Poku, later Queen Poku (r. 1750-1760), whose legendary actions established the Baoule Kingdom after leaving Kumasi. In northern regions, some armies engaged in kidnapping individuals, who were sold to other local groups and, in essence, joined matrilineages in need of wives. Unlike the enslaved captives sold to Europeans and forcibly shipped across the Atlantic, these individuals were remembered by the families they left behind. They include Nienna Mpra, a member of the royal family in Bona and taken to Sunyani. Captured in the 1880s, Nienna was the maternal grandmother of Portland's beloved community leader Kwaku Mensah (1931-2018). Resistance fighters included the army of Samori Touré (1828-1900), who raged against French occupation and control for almost two decades.

The Colonial Era

While the interior regions were shaken by centuries of slave-trading upheavals, the rocky coastline and poor harbors minimally protected the south from permanent settlements. With European renewed interest in the resources of Africa in the 19th century, that changed when European powers began staking claim to large portions of the continent. The French and British were the most prominent in seeking control of the West African region. Through treaties at the Conference of Berlin (1885), France procured the majority of Upper Guinea, plus the Ivory Coast, among its territories.

By 1904, the French colonial government formally organized French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française), with a French official governing the territories from Dakar, Senegal. Key commercial produce for export came from the coffee, cocoa, and oil palm plantations, as well as a vibrant fishing industry. Among the legacies of French rule are the reliance on migrant labor and abuse from cruel systems of forced labor. With the onset of World War I, the French had to deal with increased rebellion. As even more Ivoirians sought freedom and self-governance after World War II, organizations, including the Ivoirian Pan African party, the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement démocratique africain (PDCI-RDA) emerged, with militant female branches of some parties forcefully agitating for complete independence from France.

Birth of a Democratic Nation State

In August 1960, Cote d'Ivoire gained its independence from France. Its first elected president was Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1905-1993), founder of the PDCI and affiliated with the French Communist Party. Both farmer and rural physician, Houphouët-Boigny successfully situated himself among both laborers and elites to gain the support needed to win election. As president, Houphouët-Boigny took steps to secure his authoritarian power over most government organizations. He eventually adopted an anti-communist stance and supported attacks on other African regimes by foreign powers. Due to the economic prosperity Cote d'Ivoire experienced in the first ten years of his Presidency, sometimes called the "Ivorian Miracle," Houphouët-Boigny faced little unrest inside the country and remained president until his death in 1993. One legacy is the largest Christian church in the world, the Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussoukro Basilica, which he had built in his hometown. His immediate successor, Henri Konan Bédié (1934-) also continued previous policies but was overthrown in a 1999 military coup. After years of civil war (2002-2007), peace was mediated in part by soccer star Didier Drogba. Since then, Cote d'Ivoire has had two presidents, Laurent Gbagbo (2000, until his arrest) and the current leader, economist Alassane Ouattara (1942-), who took office following the 2010 election.

The metropolitan city of Abidjan, home to reggae superstar Alpha Blondy, is considered a musical hub in West Africa with multiple genres and recording labels located in the sprawling urban area. Music festivals are prominent and reflect the multi-ethnic construct of the nation as well as its global visitors. Dan, Gouro, and other groups continue to hold masked dances, whose transportable performances and artistry have inspired the entire world, including the Post-impressionist French artist Pablo Picasso and immigrant communities in the United States.

Cote d'Ivoire receives 42 percent of its energy from renewable sources such as hydro-electricity, solar, and biomass. There are plans to introduce wind farms. Currently the country proposes to reduce fuel consumption by 25 percent by 2030. During the colonial era and recent civil war time, Cote d'Ivoire's forests, which were some of the most bio-diverse in the world, experienced severe practices of deforestation. Continued development and clearing of agricultural land pose threats to sustainable living, including the namesake elephant herds, now mostly constrained to game reserves in the interior. The nation's cocoa industry also contributes to both deforestation and the stain of child labor (including thousands who are trafficked across international borders), the remnants of the industry's colonial roots now in the hands of multinational corporations. Similarly, coastal fishing has suffered from illegal and unsustainable practices of foreign companies in the rough waters that once protected the coastline from colonial incursions.

-- Fredrick Hardyway, 2022

Further Reading and Viewing

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