

## **EVOLUTION OF IVORIAN POPULAR FRONT IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

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***Abstract.** The matter of political leadership in West African countries affected by conflicts and instability is significant in terms of its institutionalisation through political parties and organisations. The article seeks to examine the extent to which the formal political structure and functioning of a party reflect the actual political organisation mechanisms enacted in the fragile institutional environment in the context of civil wars, interethnic violence based on the case of Côte d'Ivoire, especially in the wake of the Ivorian Civil War of 2002-2011. A particular political organisation under examination is the Ivorian Popular Front, created by the former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo and the ruling party in Côte d'Ivoire in 2000-2011. A special attention in the framework of this analysis is drawn to the issue of the ethnic and tribal basis of the political party emergence and the significance of this ethnic (religious, regional or any other identity-based) agenda for further development of the political force and its practical operations. Further analysis is devoted to the role of a leader, in this case, Laurent Gbagbo, and the formal and informal patronage networks that emerge surrounding him, the way his political choices reflect identity-based agenda or his personalised interests. Limitations imposed by a political force in a conflict-ridden West African environment are examined both in conditions of control of power over the state and after its loss. A separate question addressed is the matter of a party's ability to exist without being a dominant political force and a strong connection to the person of its founder and is there an opportunity for a political force that suffered a severe military defeat to return to prominence.*

**Keywords:** Côte d'Ivoire, Ivorian Popular Front, civil war, political leadership, ethnicity, Laurent Gbagbo

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### INTRODUCTION

The political turbulence and instability significantly deteriorated the situation in West Africa in the post-Cold War context, leading to several large conflicts, namely in Liberia, Sierra Leone and later on, Côte d'Ivoire. The latter country experienced a civil war in 2002–2007 and its resumption in 2010–2011. This Francophone nation fell victim to the outburst of violence of a smaller scale compared to its Anglophone neighbours as the regional and global context gradually stabilised in the early 2000s, and former colonial influence (exercised by France) was decisive at the initial stage of the conflict and allowed to keep the casualty rate down. Nevertheless, Ivorian political strife proved protracted and temporally extended for nearly a decade, underlying the 2010–2011 electoral crisis and the successful overthrow of the Laurent Gbagbo government. Since then, multiple concerns have been raised over the sustainability of Ivorian peace and the existing potential for a renewed struggle between former parties to the civil war. The article seeks to review the key features of the Ivorian political system, its initial characteristics that led to a crisis in the 1990s and civil war in the

2000s and the way they have transformed in the post-conflict decade. The perspective chosen to examine the systemic transformation of Ivorian politics is that of political organisations affiliated with former president Laurent Gbagbo, the Ivorian Popular Front (known under the French acronym of FPI) and its breakaway factions. This cluster of political forces represents the losing side of the conflict that has actively sought to use available political means to challenge the post-war consensus represented by the rule of President Alassane Ouattara and his supporters. The history of the given political force is to be analysed chronologically with attention to the ethnic, religious, regional, social, and economic aspects of its emergence and functioning, along with consideration for the significance of the key leadership and the formal and informal patronage networks inside the FPI.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE IVORIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM AND THE FPI COALITION

Ivorian political system began to emerge at the post-WWII stage of the French colonial rule, and in 1960 Ivory Coast (known as Côte d'Ivoire since 1986) obtained independence with the de facto one-party rule of the Ivory Coast Democratic Party (PDCI) and its leader Felix Houphouët-Boigny with heavy economic and political ties to France. His 33-year rule coincided with the era of relative socio-economic growth due to cash crop cocoa production and exports, affecting further development (Denisova 2016: 240). Like most West African states, Côte d'Ivoire is ethnically and linguistically diverse. The fragmentation of the political and economic elite is frequently based on tribal affiliation, with profound influence on the patronage networks and social hierarchy set by the Houphouët-Boigny regime (Arnaut 2004: 212). In Ivorian society, there are several ethno-territorial and linguistic groups, and their members are largely politically unified (until recently, the ethnic discourse was the dominant explanation of causes of the Ivorian conflict) (see Shipilov 2022). At the same time, even in the economically stable years of Houphouët-Boigny's rule, the government only partially managed to contain their contradictions.

Major Ivorian political forces are largely connected to the respective ethnic platforms that emerged in colonial and post-colonial decades. The dominant ethnic groups in the Ivory Coast in early colonial era were the Akan peoples inhabiting the southeast of the future Ivorian state. The colonial administration had to rely on local personnel, mainly from these coastal groups to manage the colony. The rapid development of plantation agriculture in the southeast significantly raised the economic status of its population (Arnaut 2004: 212).

Then, in the 1940s and 1950s, the actual presence of colonial administration expanded, shifting the Ivorian ethnic hierarchy in favour of the Baule people, also from the Akan family, but inhabiting the central southern areas. Under the liberal reforms in the French Africa following WWII, the Ivorian Baule used the chance to create political organisations. Large-scale Ivorian landowners were represented by the African Agrarian Syndicate (1944) and the Democratic Party of the Ivory Coast (PDCI) (1946) led by Felix Houphouët-Boigny (Arnaut 2004: 212; Denisova 2016: 228). Baule secured its dominance and established close relations with the French government. As the Ivory Coast obtained independence in 1960, Houphouët-Boigny and his Baule entourage created a one-party system led by PDCI. This regime lasted until 1993 and turned authoritarian with an anti-communist and paternalistic character, which allowed a personality cult and Baule dominance in state hierarchy (Reno 1998: 72; Arnaut 2004: 212). This dissatisfied the democratic educated non-Baule youth, shaping opposition that later became the Ivorian Popular Front.

The first two decades after the country gained independence were accompanied by high incomes from the export of plantation agriculture products, primarily cocoa beans (the so-called Ivorian economic miracle) (Gbagbo 1984; Arnaut 2004: 212; Denisova 2016: 228). In the

1980s, Ivory Coast produced the largest share of the world cocoa market (40%), being also a leader in the production of coffee in Africa (McGovern 2011: 138). These revenues allowed large infrastructure projects, and a relatively acceptable level of income was maintained for most citizens, which contained social and other contradictions of Ivorian society.

However, left-leaning and anti-colonial Ivorian scholars and political activists of the time (including historian and opposition leader Gbagbo) noted several significant flaws to this economic model (Gbagbo 1984). Economic diversification was not carried out in the three decades since 1960, making Ivorian welfare dependent on the fluctuations of the international markets and the demand for cocoa beans and resulted in low wages for Ivorian peasants, poor level of state regulation and an influx of migrant workers from neighbouring countries (Gbagbo 1984: 24). This coincided with weak domestic market capacity, undeveloped infrastructure, imbalances, and inequality, as well as external dependence. In general, the Ivorian paternalistic model proved very unstable. Socialist criticism of this system shaped the opposition movement inspired by Laurent Gbagbo.

The given features of the Ivorian economy further contributed to ethnic and regional imbalances. Representatives of migrants from neighbouring, predominantly Muslim countries, as well as related Northern Ivorian ethnic groups, became another important element of the ethnic and political crisis. At the time, there were no clear ethnic differences between northern Ivorians and residents of neighbouring countries. The north of the modern Ivory Coast and adjacent areas of neighbouring states are inhabited by the ethnic groups of Dioula, Maninka, Senoufo and northern Mande on both sides of the Ivorian border (with difficulties in determining their citizenship) (McGovern 2011: 8). They predominantly profess Islam, unlike the southerners. Economically Ivorian north relies on cotton, less profitable than the export cash crops grown in the south (coffee and cocoa), leading to fewer subsistence opportunities. Meanwhile, the population growth in the northern Ivory Coast and neighbouring countries was extremely high, creating an excessive labour force moving to southern cocoa plantations. During the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s, additional labour was welcomed. The Ivorian leadership allocated land to loyal migrants on preferential terms, provided a simplified procedure for entering citizenship and offered them the right to vote in Ivorian elections (Arnaut 2004: 214). Thus, fairly stable political patronage relations developed between Baule national leadership and the Northerners loyal to the PDCI government, which was the cornerstone of Ivorian stability for decades after 1960.

Hence, by the 1990s, a large migrant community emerged in southern Côte d'Ivoire. The southeastern indigenous population, having lost its colonial privileged position to the Baule, rejected both the inequalities in the public administration sector and the influx of migrants from the north. The population of the southwest of the country (the predominant area of cocoa bean production), peoples of the Kru family, including Bete (the ethnic group of Laurent Gbagbo), also could not profit from economic growth and were increasingly in discontent with Baule authorities releasing a massive flow of foreign workers over the region (Arnaut 2004: 214).

As a result of the policy, excluding a significant segment of Ivorian society, the south-eastern and south-western regions of the country have become a stable stronghold of the opposition, igniting the Kragbe-Gnagbe uprising in 1970 (Marshall-Fratani 2006: 20-21). At the end of Houphouët-Boigny's reign, the main source of his paternalistic system was compromised due to the collapse in world prices for cocoa beans in the 1980s, halving the revenues for Ivorian farmers (McGovern 2011: 146). Thus, the relative ethnic and political stability was undermined, giving way to the upcoming crisis.

The grievances of the southeast and southwest ethnic groups had significantly accumulated by the 1980s but had to be revealed otherwise than the rebellion of Kragbe

Gnagbe. A group of academic workers from this respective ethnic background started to promote the autochthonous culture of the disadvantaged regions, challenging the regime culturally and fostering unions for students and professors at Ivorian universities. Laurent Gbagbo led this movement and publicised the critics of the Ivorian economic model and dependency on France. He began active participation in the socio-political life of the country in the late 1970s, and in 1982 established and headed the new opposition political movement – the Ivorian Popular Front. Due to the persecution by the Houphouet-Boigny regime, he found himself in exile in France without any legal status almost immediately after the party was established (McGovern 2011: 89). Gbagbo used his exile in France to continue his academic career and establish close ties with the then-ruling Socialist party of France which later became a valuable alliance for his political force.

### FPI AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IVORIAN POLITICAL CRISIS (1990–2011)

The economic downturn of the 1980s and the shifting external balance of power in the wake of the Cold War completed facilitated some liberalisation of the Ivorian regime. After Houphouet-Boigny authorised a multiparty system in 1990, Gbagbo participated in presidential and parliamentary elections held that year as an opposition candidate enjoying the support of the majority in the southwest of the country and gaining 18% overall (it was claimed that due to the support of the French Socialist party) (Varenne 2012: 65; Denisova 2016: 229). However, Gbagbo and his supporters remained dissatisfied with the election results, accusing Houphouet-Boigny of using the illegitimate votes of Northerners to achieve victory.

Interethnic tensions intensified in 1990 when a group of delegates of the northern Ivorian ethnic groups signed the Charter of the North – a document demanding full political rights to the Dioula, Senufo, Mande and Maninka peoples on a par with the Akan ethnic groups (among them the Baule was the largest and the most dominant one) (Arnaut 2004: 212). Democratic transformations carried out in line with global trends and entailed the revival of a multiparty political system, the presidential and parliamentary elections, growing political activity of young people, as well as the death in 1993 of the long-term president Felix Houphouet-Boigny led to a crisis of political governance of the country. The departure of Houphouet-Boigny and especially the economic crisis weakened the unity of the ethnic-tribal patronage network, traditionally backing up the PDCI regime. The overdue conflict between Baule and the northerners was personified in a power struggle between Henri Conan Bedie, former speaker of the parliament proceeding to become an interim President and being a representative of Baule, and Alassane Ouattara, then Prime Minister and an ethnic Senufo from the north of the country (and the future and active Ivorian President). Bedie and Ouattara were unable to reach a political compromise after the death of Houphouet-Boigny, followed by the resignation and expulsion of the Prime Minister. This pushed a group of Northern politicians from the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire to break away into the Assembly of Republicans (known under the French acronym of RDR), led by Ouattara. The Bedie regime in order to keep the loyalty of most ethnic groups, was forced to limit the rights of migrants and Northerners who supported the RDR. This contributed to the growth of interethnic hostility.

The rising political crisis allowed for the strengthening of Gbagbo-led FPI and growing Laurent Gbagbo's electoral opportunities. In April 1990, his allies, under the auspices of Charles Ble Goude established the Federation of Students and Instructors of Côte d'Ivoire (known in French as FESCI), which became the youth branch of the FPI and proved very effective in rallying Gbagbo's supporters on the streets of Abidjan (Arnaut 2004: 232). And with the split between the Akan ethnic groups and delegates of the north in the ruling

coalition and the confrontation between Bedie and Ouattara, FPI increased representation of the southeast and southwest peoples. Natives of the Kru peoples finally obtained an opportunity to improve their traditionally low status within post-independence Ivorian society. In addition, the Attie and Dida ethnic groups from outside the Kru realm in the southwest of the country, presenting the Abidjan region, also consolidated around Gbagbo and his political allies. This strengthened the positions of the Ivorian Popular Front in the struggle for power. Subsequently, in the Ivorian political field, the ethnic base of support for Laurent Gbagbo was named BAD (Bete, Attie, Dida) in accordance with the main most loyal to him ethnic groups (McGovern 2011: 89). Gbagbo and his followers were again subjected to political repression in 1992–1993 in response to their protests against the socio-economic policy pursued by the Ouattara government. But as Bedie came to power in 1994, FPI reached the status of one of the key political forces in the country. Thus, by the end of the twentieth century, the three most powerful opposing political groups with mass ethnic support, PDCI, RDR and FPI, had emerged in Côte d'Ivoire's political space. At the same time, none of these forces had the opportunity to independently control the political situation in the country, which forced them to actively form political alliances among themselves.

Further escalation of the Ivorian political crisis was marked by the weaponisation of ethnic agenda to disenfranchise large groups of the country's population. Bedie's break with the Northerners resulted in a policy of restricting the rights of "non-Ivorians" (mainly Northerners and migrants with unproved autochthonous status). Since 1995, to justify this policy, pro-government intellectuals have been promoting the ideology of "Ivorianness" (nationalism of South Ivorian ethnic groups that consider themselves autochthonous), used by the Bedie regime to revise the civil and electoral rights of Northerners. In particular, on the basis of the new restrictive laws, Alassane Ouattara was denied participation in the 1995 presidential election (due to his alleged Burkinabe origins) (Cheeseman 2015: 155). This sharply increased the discontent of the inhabitants of the north of the country with Bedie's policy and became the basis for the joint efforts of Ouattara, Gbagbo and the Chief of the General Staff, General Robert Guei to remove him from power. These efforts were crowned with success when, on December 24, 1999, the first in the history of Côte d'Ivoire coup d'état was carried out. General Robert Guei became acting President of the country. Bedie was forced to flee to France, which isolated him from active participation in Ivorian political processes (Varenne 2012: 65).

In accordance with the preliminary arrangements of the organisers of the coup d'état Guei was to become the interim head of state and then relinquish power in favour of the winner of the 2000 elections. However, in the summer of 2000, he nominated his own candidacy for the upcoming elections and took steps to remove the strongest competitors from the electoral race. The main measures concerned the non-admission to the elections of Alassane Ouattara, the most popular politician at that time, from among the conspirators who supported the overthrow of Bedie, (Varenne 2012: 65). Guei used the policy of restricting the rights of the "non-Ivorian" population pursued by his predecessor, also somewhat expanding the scope of its application and the measure of restrictions. On June 23, 2000, the interim Head of State organised a referendum causing the adoption of a new Constitution. Article 35 of the new Constitution significantly restricted the access of potential candidates to the elected positions, primarily the President, on the basis of origin (Ouattara and the other 14 out of 20 candidates nominated for the 2000 elections did not meet these criteria and were not allowed to participate). As a result of these measures, with the exception of General Guei, the most popular and well-known politicians in the country actually had no access to the elections. Realising his own political ambitions and the discriminatory policy of "Ivorianness" inherited from Bedie, Guei lost the support of the coalition that contributed to his coming to power.



Nevertheless, as an unplanned result of the measures taken by General Guei that prevented Ouattara and Bedie from participating in the elections on October 22, 2000, was the victory of Laurent Gbagbo. He relied on the broad support of the ethnic groups of the southwest of Côte d'Ivoire while most of the rest of the country's population abstained from the polls as their preferred candidate was not on the ballot. Later, the Constitutional Commission of Côte d'Ivoire recognized the data of the National Electoral Commission as valid, with 59% of the votes cast for Gbagbo and 33% for Guei. Conversely, the interim head of State terminated the vote count and declared himself the winner. These actions provoked a new coup d'état carried out by forces loyal to Gbagbo on October 24, 2000. The general was forced to abandon his post and leave the country, fleeing to Benin. The overthrow of Guei and the transfer of power into the hands of Laurent Gbagbo was also promoted by other political groups of the country that was not directly allowed to participate in the elections. As a result of the actions of the presidential guard controlled by Guei, 60 supporters of the newly elected president were killed (McGovern 2011: 18). Based on the recount initiated by the winners, the final election results, recognised by the National Election Commission and the Constitutional Court, were published, and Gbagbo was proclaimed the new legitimate head of state. But it was not recognised by the supporters of Alassane Ouattara, provoking the clashes with multiple casualties between them and law enforcement agencies loyal to Guei and then Gbagbo. Nevertheless, the new FPI-dominated regime gained the support of the French Socialist party and France's Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, approving the major opposition party to finally obtain power and international recognition (Varenne 2012: 65).

During the first years of his rule, the new President continued the policies of the previous heads of State to restrict the rights of non-indigenous (Northern) people. As a result, a significant part of the population of the north of the country faced the threat of deprivation of Ivorian citizenship and related civil rights. Therefore, in the north of Ivory Coast, the popularity of the new president quickly declined, and it was the starting point when the discontent with the new political regime began to grow. The potential for cooperation with Bedie and, most significantly, Guei, was annulled by September 2002 as Gbagbo was unwilling to provide any of his partners with effective benefits of the power-sharing agreement both at regional and national levels. Hence, Guei publicly renounced the Gbagbo regime, and the FPI cabinet was left without internal allies (Varenne 2012: 69).

On September 19, 2002, while Gbagbo was abroad, former Northern Ivorian soldiers (headed by Ibrahim Coulibaly) who had previously been suspended from service in the armed forces and fled to Burkina Faso attempted to carry out a coup in Abidjan (Varenne 2012: 55-56). The attempt was unsuccessful and was accompanied by the deaths of Robert Guei and Interior Minister Emile Boga Doudou. However, the rebels successfully occupied the cities of Korogho in the far north of the country and Bouake in the centre of Côte d'Ivoire, effectively capturing the entire north. Thus, part of the country went under the insurgents' control but nevertheless, the Gbagbo supporters were able to maintain control over the southern part of the country, and several attempts were made to reclaim what was lost, effectively igniting the Ivorian civil war.

As it began, Gbagbo's supporters, in addition to FESCI, established multiple militarised youth organisations focused on mobilising the population in support of the ruling regime and exerting great influence on the population of Ivorian cities. The largest and most prominent one was the "Young Patriots" organisation (Jeunes Patriotes), headed by Charles Bleu Goude. The impetus for their emergence was a certain radicalisation of nationalist sentiments. These "patriotic" youth organisations supporting Gbagbo were not directly incorporated into the public administration system and even sometimes allowed themselves to criticise the actions

of the regime, but in general, they acted with the consent and the support of the Government. Hence the FPI itself in the official capacity was now limited. Further limitations arrived as neither of the parties to the war was able to achieve quick success, and France interfered directly, separating the combatants, and pushing both parties towards a peaceful resolution. This materialised in January 2003 Linas-Marcoussis Agreement resulting, among other things, in the establishment of the national unity government headed by a non-FPI Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny instead of the formal head of FPI since 2001 (as Gbagbo became President) and the former Prime Minister Pascal Affi N'Guessan (McGovern 2011: 22-23). Years of further negotiations and occasional resumptions of violence followed, ending in March 2007 Ouagadougou Agreement. According to it Gbagbo was forced to appoint Guillaume Soro, the head of the rebels, as the head of the government in lieu of a loyal FPI figure until the subsequent presidential elections. Thus, for the entire period of the conflict settlement until the October 2010 Presidential elections, the official role of the FPI was limited by the power-sharing agreements while pro-Gbagbo militias gained more sustainability outside of the official party networks.

Gbagbo and Ouattara were contenders in the run-off elections in 2010. After the polls closed, a post-electoral crisis began since both election participants considered themselves winners (Welz 2021: 210). The Independent Electoral Commission declared Ouattara the winner of the presidential election with 54.10% (while Gbagbo got 45.90%). However, the Constitutional Commission of Côte d'Ivoire, authorised to approve the winner in accordance with article 94 of the Constitution, had doubts about the integrity of the elections in seven districts in the north of the country. Taking into account the violations and inconsistencies that occurred, the court annulled 600,000 votes cast for Ouattara and concluded that Laurent Gbagbo won the election, but neither Ouattara nor the Western countries recognised the Constitutional court's decision (Charvin 2011: 104). Gbagbo, using article 48 of the Constitution, which allows the introduction of a state of emergency in the event of a threat to the security of the State, suspended the Government of Soro and the Independent Electoral Commission. There was an outbreak of violence between supporters of both candidates, which led to significant casualties.

A new uprising began in the north, and the former "New Forces" (rebels headed by Soro), reorganised into the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (RFCI), began advancing to the south. By March 2011, armed rebel groups occupied the capital of Yamoussoukro and the main port involved in cocoa exports – San Pedro. Then they found themselves near Abidjan, which threatened the political regime of Laurent Gbagbo. Such a rapid advance of the "New Forces" to the south turned out to be possible in the conditions of fairly loyal behaviour of representatives of the UN and France. On March 30, 2011, the UN Security Council approved a resolution that the French leadership regarded as giving the French peacekeeping contingent a free hand in relation to the regime of Laurent Gbagbo (which was based on the controversial, from the point of view of the Russian Federation, interpretation of Articles 6 and 7 of this resolution) (Charvin 2011). On March 31, Republican forces approached the business capital, and on April 1, French peacekeepers began landing in and occupied the Abidjan airport. After that, military air strikes were carried out on the military facilities of the Government and the residence of Laurent Gbagbo, and on April 11, repeated shelling and storming of the residence was undertaken, followed by the capture of the former president (Sadovskaya 2015b: 68-69). As a result, power in Ivory Coast was transferred to Alassane Ouattara, which marked the end of the civil confrontation.

Thus, the FPI regime was overthrown, with persecutions following from the new Ouattara government, and the party was now in the most vulnerable position that had to be addressed as Gbagbo, his wife Simone and Charles Ble Goude were arrested and sent to the Hague to be

tried by the International criminal court. Recovering from this crisis would be the most significant challenge faced by the party.

### OVERCOMING THE LOSS OF POWER AND FRAGMENTATION

The loss of power by Laurent Gbagbo and his party in 2011 bore immense significance for the Ivorian political system in general and the political force itself. The reforms that were finalised upon Ouattara taking presidency included the final legitimisation of the disenfranchised Northern population deprived of the full electoral rights for most of the multi-party era of the Ivorian political system (this was agreed upon beforehand during the conflict peace negotiations but was not fully implemented in the course of the contested 2010 elections). It implied the loss of the previous advantageous position for the Southern Ivorian political forces as now their political rivals from RDR (merged into RHDP, the Assembly of Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace, in 2019) could enjoy stronger electoral support apart from taking control over the executive branch. Political and criminal persecutions followed the end of the conflict as the key FPI political figures were arrested and partially extradited to trial at the International criminal court (ICC). Many more Gbagbo partisans had to leave the country and flee (mostly to neighbouring Ghana), while non-partisan government officials (namely from the army and security forces) mostly switched their allegiance to the new President. Moreover, FPI was alienated by other Ivorian political forces as both New Forces leader and Prime Minister Guillaume Soro and Bedie, still head of PDCI, willingly supported Ouattara presidency in hopes of prolonging their political alliance and obtaining RDR support in the upcoming 2015 elections. Finally, the major challenge for the FPI was whether to maintain its presence in the Ivorian branches of government and establish relations with Ouattara Presidency in order to keep whatever political influence the organisation had or to boycott the regime FPI hardliners considered illegitimate.

Major efforts in order to normalise relations with the new government were undertaken by Mamadou Koulibaly, a former Gbagbo top supporter, a minister in a number of cabinets and a speaker of the Ivorian Parliament since 2001. His relations with Gbagbo soured in the summer of 2010 in the run-up to the presidential elections (having lost court strife against other Gbagbo top aides and for family honor reasons), he was absent during Gbagbo's inauguration after self-proclaimed victory and remained neutral over the course of 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis, trying to negotiate for political solution, fleeing to Ghana at the final stage of rebel assault on Abidjan. He returned on April 19, 2011, maintaining his position as speaker of the Parliament and assuming the leadership of FPI as its formal leader Pascal Affi N'Guessan also was arrested. Koulibaly engaged in direct negotiations with Ouattara, obtaining his support for the stabilization in the capital and protection for the FPI partisans from the former rebels in control of Abidjan as well as security of Gbagbo's native Bete ethnic group. As Koulibaly was willing to cooperate with the new President, Ouattara reaffirmed his position as the head of the FPI-dominated parliament until the parliamentary elections of 11 December 2011. As the head of FPI Koulibaly was even offered several positions in the ministerial cabinet for the moderate FPI nominees but this offer was declined by the majority of the party members who maintained their loyalty to imprisoned Gbagbo and considered the new regime illegitimate. Hence the party boycotted the December 2011 elections, losing control and even presence in the executive branch. Mamadou Koulibaly left FPI with a number of moderates in July 2011, establishing *Liberté et Démocratie pour la République* (LIDER) political organization which failed to independently gain the political support of the large parts of the Ivorian population. The radical pro-Gbagbo faction inside FPI, inspired by Abdurramane Sangare (one of the original FPI founding members), ensured



the continued boycott of Ivorian politics until justice would be restored for the former President.

Pascal Affi N'Guessan, the formal head of the FPI, was liberated from imprisonment on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, along with a few other Gbagbo supporters and since then chose a more moderate path of party leadership in regard to participation in Ivorian politics. In the run-up to the 2015 Presidential elections, the Ivorian court blocked Gbagbo candidacy as he was still being tried at the ICC. In these circumstances, Pascal Affi N'Guessan chose to run in these elections himself, but a large part of the FPI renounced his participation claiming Laurent Gbagbo as the only legitimate FPI candidate. Sangare pushed the radical stance with the support of Simone Gbagbo. Laurent Gbagbo himself, while in prison, called for a boycott of elections [Koudou 2017: 59]. The conflict resulted in Sangare being affirmed by the party as its interim president on 5 March 2015 and then a court trial between N'Guessan and Sangare, with the former winning and returning the right to represent FPI and run for the presidential office on the party's behalf (Jeune Afrique 3 avril 2015). In the 25 October 2015 elections N'Guessan came second, scoring 9.2%. His electoral base largely consisted of the Ivorian south-eastern Akan ethnic groups as he himself belongs to the Attie and not to the Kru family of the southwest like most of the FPI electoral base.

Thus, the split reflected on the FPI ethnic electoral base, tearing apart the Kru ethnic groups mostly affiliated with Sangare faction and their traditional southeastern allies with more direct relations with Pascal Affi N'Guessan. This, apart from the largely disenfranchised status and the party's limited political participation, significantly undermined both the unity and political viability of FPI. Due to this, the party under N'Guessan leadership was only able to win 3 seats out of 255 in the 2016 Parliamentary election (Sadovskaya 2017: 32). The split was finalised on 20 April 2017 when Abdourramane Sangare established Ensemble pour la démocratie et la souveraineté (EDS) – the Assembly for the Democracy and Sovereignty, making it the major FPI break-away faction and a leading pro-Gbagbo Ivorian political force since the Ouattara government reaffirmed N'Guessan's control over the original party (VOA Afrique 04 août 2018). Georges Armand Ouegnin headed the new organisation. On 6 August 2018, Simone Gbagbo was pardoned by the Ouattara government among other former FPI partisans and engaged in the radical pro-Gbagbo movement, trying to obtain the position of leadership, but failed to obtain the support of both N'Guessan and her husband. On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018, Abdourramane Sangare deceased, thus the radical branch of the former FPI lost its most prominent leader. 2019 was marked by the liberation of Laurent Gbagbo from ICC (with permission to settle in Belgium) and his expressed desire to divorce Simone, formerly his most loyal political supporter. Alassane Ouattara ran for a third term, although it was preceded by extended hesitations (Sadovskaya 2015a: 59). In October 2020, Pascal Affi N'Guessan was the only contender to him from the original FPI (scoring 4<sup>th</sup> and 1.01% of the vote, explicitly losing the support of the former party base) (Le Conseil Constitutionnel 2020). Laurent Gbagbo was allowed to return to the country after the Presidential elections were over (which he ultimately did on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021). EDS once again boycotted the Presidential elections but entered a partnership with Bedie and PDCI to contend in the 2021 Parliamentary ones. EDS obtained 8 seats separately and 10 more in a block with PDCI, altogether gaining 18 and obtaining the third largest faction in the Parliament while the FPI controlled by Pascal Affi N'Guessan only earned 2 seats, effectively losing the remnants of its political prominence (When the parties go to pieces 2021).

Hence EDS became the leading and politically most influential successor to the original FPI, which was reaffirmed by the organization's close ties with Laurent Gbagbo. In October 2021, Gbagbo announced the creation of a new Party of African Nations, Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI), and EDS members joined it, transferring its 18 parliamen-

tary seats to the new political force along with the status of the leading former FPI successor (Bonjour Journal 17/10/2022). Under Gbagbo's leadership (whose candidacy for the 2025 Presidential elections was blocked by the Ivorian judiciary), this political force became more conciliatory compared to the years of Sangare dominance, maintaining the alliance with PDCI and even supporting the RHDP ruling party candidacy for the Parliament speaker in 2022.

Apart from the remnants of FPI and the reformed PPA-CI movement, there is an array of smaller break-away factions of former Gbagbo loyalists. Koulibaly's LIDER movement includes the Movement of Capable Generations – *Mouvement des générations capables* created by Simone Gbagbo in August 2022 (Gbagbo began divorce proceedings with her in 2021) as she distanced politically from her former husband, being unable to secure a prominent position in larger breakaway factions of the FPI despite being one of the original founding members to the Front (L'Orient-Le Jour 22 août 2022). Another key former Gbagbo loyalist that entered the Ivorian political scene is Charles Ble Goude, who returned to Abidjan on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022 after being acquitted by the ICC like his former boss and pardoned by Ouattara (Africa confidential 1st Dec. 2022). He refrained from expressing preserved loyalty to Laurent Gbagbo and was courted both by Simone Gbagbo and Pascal Affi N'Guessan upon his arrival in hopes of obtaining his support for their respective political projects. Nevertheless, he preferred to develop his own project, Pan-African Congress for Justice, Equality and Peace (*Congrès panafricain pour la justice et l'égalité des peuples, Cojep*) on the basis of his former Jeunes patriots political infrastructure. However, these figures and their political movements are not as significant as PPA-CI in terms of their public prominence and support.

Thus, the largest remnant of FPI has overcome its isolation and is again actively engaged in Ivorian politics despite limitations enforced by the Ouattara regime (roughly returning to the level of political influence Gbagbo's supporters enjoyed in the 1990s). As the last decade has shown, there was a significant part of the Ivorian society professing strong loyalty to Laurent Gbagbo even in conditions of his military and political loss and imprisonment, and this has allowed political forces inside FPI to maintain the same loyalty to preserve their political viability and return to the Ivorian politics as a fairly significant movement while the moderate FPI faction (represented by Mamadou Koulibaly and later by Pascal Affi N'Guessan) lost public support and political significance. This allows for a further resurgence of the Gbagbo-led political movement (which nevertheless heavily depends on his personal following) and makes it one of the key players determining the situation in the country.

## CONCLUSION

The traced path of political evolution that the FPI movement has undergone in the years of political opposition to the authoritarian one-party regime of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the political turbulence of the 1990s, its own rule of 2000s tested by the civil war, external interference and semi-independent grass-root movements, as well as the decade of political persecution and fragmentation after having lost power, allows inferring several features of the Ivorian political system. Firstly, the original mobilisation base for the FPI as well as PDCI, RDR, UPDCI and their derivative organisations was ethnically and linguistically determined. However, further on, these movements got highly associated with the key political figures, Gbagbo, Houphouët-Boigny and then Bedie and Ouattara, respectively, for the FPI, PDCI and RDR. In the course of the parity between these political groups in the wake of the 1990s' democratisation, the given political leaders showed significant political flexibility, frequently countering the presumed ethnic interests they represented. This allows questioning the significance of the ethnic aspect of these movements at later stages of their development. The

prominence of a political movement in Côte d'Ivoire once it attains power might be limited by the transfer of the political agency to the executive branch centered around the top political figure as well as informal political structures loosely loyal to the top political figures but not the structured political party he formally represents. As the political movement loses power, it may face existential threats and challenges but may be preserved in one form or another as long as the original political leader has a chance to return to Ivorian politics and the movement maintains strong personal loyalty to the leader that maintains high popularity. Other, more moderate breakaway factions quickly lose popular support. Hence the formal political structure appears secondary to the informal patronage network between a popular political leader (with initial reliance on ethnic agenda and grievances) and his followers and clients, while Ivorian politics remains highly personified.

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## ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ИВУАРИЙСКОГО НАРОДНОГО ФРОНТА В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ СИСТЕМЕ КОТ-Д'ИВУАРА

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***Аннотация.** Вопрос политического лидерства в странах Западной Африки, затронутых конфликтами, важен с точки зрения его институционализации через политические партии и организации. Данная статья направлена на изучение степени отражения формальной политической структуры партии, реальных механизмов политической организации, действующих в нестабильной институциональной среде в контексте гражданских конфликтов на примере Кот-д'Ивуара, особенно после гражданской войны 2002–2011 гг. Конкретно рассматривается Ивуарийский народный фронт, правящая партия в Кот-д'Ивуаре в 2000–2011 гг. Особое внимание в рамках данного анализа уделяется вопросу этнической и племенной основы возникновения политической партии роли лидера, и формальным и неформальным сетям патронажа, особенностям политической силы при власти и после ее потери.*

***Ключевые слова:** Кот-д'Ивуар, Ивуарийский народный фронт, гражданская война, политическое руководство, этническая принадлежность, Лоран Гбагбо*

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