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The separation of ethnicity and election in Africa: The case for Cote d'Ivoire

Abstract

On 28 November 2010, Cote d'Ivoire held its first democratic presidential elections. The run off was a battle between Laurent Gbagbo and Allassane Ouattara. The ballot was not "fair" because the election was rigged in the north which is a stronghold of Ouattara and mostly dominated by Muslims. The result has sparked off another ethnic tension between the Dioula and Bete. Given the introduction of an ultra-nationalist politics known as *Ivoirite,* Ivorian electorate is known for its complexity because ethnicity seems to play a significant role on the choice of voters and politicians. This essay seeks to examine the effect of ethnicity on democratic elections in Cote d'Ivoire. It argues that while the possibility of ethnic impact cannot be fully ignored and while the ethnic tension between north and south is a reality, this divide is not necessary linked to the ethnic factor. This argument is illustrated with evidence from 2000 and 2010 elections in Cote d'Ivoire. An analysis shows a contrast in various forms in terms of individual vote and the modification of ethnic allegiance and family members have different views about candidates during elections. Voters' choices in Cote d'Ivoire are probably based on the politics of identity but not all political parties are determined by ethnicity.

Introduction

> If I only rely on the Bete vote even if I must be king in my town,
> I would not go that far. But it is result of a deep conviction:
> modern vote is the future. More than the third of the electors
> live in the melting-pot of Abidjan. And Abidjan is the factory of
> Ivorian future. This is where the battle would be more
> interesting to watch: it will be a battle for democratic values,
> an ethnic battle.[1]

Despite the introduction of a multiparty system in Africa since 1990[2], little is known about the determinants of party preference and voting behaviour in Africa. The controversial question of national identity which is used by most political parties in Cote d'Ivoire seems to confirm the view that ethnic affiliation determines political preference. It also seems to support the view that political parties tend to be "ethnic". The most recent post election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire seems also to confirm that assumption.

The objective of this paper is to contribute to a far more robust debate about ethnicity and election by looking at Cote d'Ivoire, a country vastly neglected by the Anglophone

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[1] My translation: Before the last election outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo gave an interview to Jeune Afrique in 2010. According to Laurent Gbagbo's Adviser Alain Toussaint, Abidjan represents about 60% of the nation electorate.

[2] As Analysts such as Christian Bouquet noted, multiparty in the Western world is an important component of the democratically established process. But in Africa after 50 years of independence, African societies have some difficulties integrating democracy.

dominated literature. First, a brief background of Cote d'Ivoire is presented and the political context of the 2000 and 2010 elections. Thereafter, the paper turns to the community vote, an analysis of the ethnic vote factor, and the theory, before examining the implications for democracy. The importance of ethnic vote is worth investigating in light of imminent Ivorian elections. An attempt to explain Cote d'Ivoire ethnicity is required to understand ethnic vote.

Background
There are about 60 ethnic groups in Cote d'Ivoire which can be grouped in 4 main ethno-linguistic or socio-cultural groups. The Twi from the Akan group, the Malinke, Dan and Kweni from the Mande group, the Senoufo, Koulango and Lobi from the Gur group and the We, Bete, Dida, Bakwe and Neyo from the Krous group.[3]

Cote d'Ivoire (332,453 km square), is geographically situated in West Africa and shares borders with Liberia (south-west), Guinea (north-west), Mali and Burkina Faso (north), Ghana (east) and the Atlantic ocean and the Gulf of Guinea (south).

Cote d'Ivoire is a former French colony in West Africa which is still considered as a Francophone country because of its link with part of the French culture, eg language and fashion. With its 21.57 million people in 2010[4], which is comparable to the size of New Mexico, Cote d'Ivoire has shown a sense of stability from the independence from France on 7 August 1960 until 1990. Multiparty system was established in 1990 after thirty years of iron wist by Houphouet-Boigny.

It has arguably the strongest economy in the francophone region, attracting foreign investors like France. This strong economy was built on agricultural policies which attracted migrants from its northern borders like Mali and Burkina Faso[5] working cheaply in exchange for jobs, land and farming rights in the south, where a dynamic multi-ethnic was created. Foreigners represent 26% of the population, according to the 1998 data.[6]

The "foreign vote"[7] process which was initiated by Houphouet-Boigny in the1960s was carried on by his successor Henri Konan Bedie and the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire

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[3] Culturally and in terms of ethnicity, the Baoule, Malinke and their neighbors Yacouba appear to be close to the coalition while the Guere are FPI militants.

[4] See Cote d'Ivoire pays le plus riche d'Afrique de l'Ouest francophone, AFP 7 December 2011.

[5] It must be noted that from 1933-1947, 2/3 of the current Burkina Faso, formerly called Haute Volta belonged to Cote d'Ivoire.

[6] The political reason behind this large proportion of foreigners was essentially to build the railway from Abidjan to Niger, exploit the forest and work on the cocoa and coffee plantations, so a massive transfer of foreign workers was necessary.

[7] Houphouet-Boigny's politics was about social inclusion but too little too late. His transition to multi-party politics came too late during his presidency.

(PDCI) until at least 1995[8] when he won the presidential elections. The right to vote was officially withdrawn from foreigners in 1990.[9]

The foreign vote was commonly used in the west among migrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea in order to win election. The PDCI warmed foreigners about the prospect of being expelled if the rival Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) was elected. FPI in returned was strongly opposed to the Non-Ivorian vote, and his leader Laurent Gbagbo described it as a *betail electoral*, electoral cattle. The legislative election was held on 11 December aiming to accelerate the normalisation process due to the November 2010 election which caused at least 3,000 deaths according to the UN report.[10] With this background in mind, it is possible to begin with the 2000 controversial elections as Ouattara once again was prevented from participating by Gbagbo.[11]

Cote d'Ivoire 2000 elections
Following several controversies, the October 2000 election was finally held. Gbagbo and his group from FPI claimed the election was rigged by Guei and Ouattara from the Rally of the Republicans (RDR)[12] demanded that the election be re-run. At the 2000 election, the government failed to offer an alternative economic policy. It vested great faith in a policy of xenophobia, an issue of no real concern for most Ivorians at that time.

Gbagbo's victory was ratified by the Supreme Court, which awarded him 53% of the votes. Many Analysts of the October 2000 election interpreted Gbagbo's win as a reflection of his political skills.[13] The extensive violence from the controversial 2000 election revealed deep-seated ethno-regional and religious divisions after the polls, resulting in clashes between FPI and RDR supporters.[14]

It must be mentioned that prior to the election, constitutional changes were approved by an 87% margin in a referendum. 57% of Ivorian participated in the referendum. It has been reported that 68% of Ivorians from the north were strongly opposed to changes, but the participation level was low in the north.[15] The changes required both parents of a

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[8] Non-Ivorians lost the right to vote. They first voted in 1945. But article 49 stipulated that to become president the candidate's must be born in Cote d'Ivoire and both his parents must be also born in Cote d'Ivoire. Article 77 dealt with the election criteria for parliamentarians.

[9] The PDCI, former single party was determined not only to win all elections but also to make its opponents loose. Therefore it manipulated the two blocs of representative democracy, namely the electors and those who were eligible to vote.

[10] See also article by AFP "Cote d'Ivoire: les trois grandes forces politiques en presence", 16 December 2011.

[11] The first time he was prevented from participating was during the 1995 election by Bedie.

[12] Critics regularly point out that the RDR is a party of the northerners or "Dioula", a generic term used to designate people from this region who are mainly Muslims.

[13] Gbagbo excluded his two main political rivals Bedie and Alassane from the 2000 presidential election.

[14] FPI's strategy was to eliminate as much as opponents as possible. Ouattara was a victim because of his ethnicity. Former President Bedie was a victim for reportedly not being able to provide good medical record.

[15] During the 2000 election as mentioned, all the potential candidates were systematically eliminated by Supreme court judge Tia Kone, so only Gbagbo was opposed to General Guei.

presidential candidate to be Ivorian-born citizens. The previous provision stated that only one parent of the candidate must be of Ivorian birth.[16]

Cote d'Ivoire 2010 elections
During the first round on October 31st, 4.84 million out of 5.78 million registered voters went to the polls. The voter participation rate was historically high with 83.7%[17] perhaps because Ivorians were in a rush to finish with the conflict and deal with a President with a new legitimacy. While the three major contenders Laurent Gbagbo, Alassane Ouattara and Henri Konan Bedie campaigned nationwide, the 11 less powerful contenders including the unique women candidate Professor Jacqueline Oble campaigned in their respective constituencies.[18]

In what was described as a peaceful, but rather long-delayed first-round election, the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara had scored 38.3% and 32.8% of the votes respectively. Henri Konan Bedie came 3rd with 25.24%. But let's take a closer look at the results of each main candidate. Laurent Gbagbo the Presidential Majority (LMP) 1st, won the election in his native Fromager region in the west, including the south. He also won in the western mountainous region as well as in part of the eastern region.

Alassane Ouattara who is a native from the north had a landside victory. If the vote was fair, he obtained over 96% in Deguele, over 91% in the Savana area, 81% in the Bafing district, 91% in Worodougou, 88% in the Badama valley. Thus, he scored very well in each area of the north.[19] Henri Konan Bedie who is a native from the central-east from the Akan group won the poll in the Lakes region of Yamoussoukro, the Nzi Comoe region and in the Bas Sassandra (south west) region where there is a large community of Akan.[20]

These results showed that ethnic vote had an impact but it did not allow any candidate to win enough votes at the national level to form a government in his own right. In other words, it illustrated in a dramatic fashion how current political parties must build coalitions to be successful on polling day.[21] Perhaps far more importantly, they must provide good policies, and retain loyalties of those coalitions at the next election to retain office, as

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[16] The amendment of the constitution in 2000 was meant to definitely solve the Ivorian problem.

[17] See President Bakayoko, (Cote d'Ivoire Independent Electoral Commission) interview with L'Express, 14 June 2011, www.abidjan.net, (accessed 16 June 2011).

[18] The results from the first round show Gbagbo ahead with 756, 504 votes, Ouattara with 1,481,091 votes and Bedie 1,165,532 as reported by the carter Center.

[19] Ouattara condemned the electoral law which focused on parents' identity, ethnicity and religion. He said it was bad for democracy and bad for the nation in 1995. But in 2010 he played the ethnic card more than any one else. See his interview on Jeune Afrique on 28/9/1995,wwwjeuneafrique.com, (accessed 30/9/2011.

[20] RDR, UDPCI, MFA and PDCI formed a coalition known as RHDP (Rassemblement des Houphouetistes pour la democratie et la paix). RDR won the election due to the Baoule vote (centre), one of the main ethnic groups in Cote d'Ivoire. Presidents Houphouet-Boigny and Bedie belong to that ethnic group.

[21] Analysts such as Sie Souleymane says Ouattara has not been elected for RHPD, Baoule or its own ethnic group (Dioula). He has been elected for the entire nation. See L'Intelligent d'Abidjan, www.abidjan.net 20 June 2011, (accessed 21 June 2011).

Professor Ian McAllister from the Australian National University suggests.[22] While each election in Cote d'Ivoire is unique with different priorities and full of controversies, one common theme is community vote, which will be looked at the next section.

Community vote

Recent studies show that community vote is increasing in Cote d'Ivoire, in Abidjan the economic capital in particular.[23] In the west for instance, in 2001 the Front Populair Ivoirien (FPI) won many seats because of his strong support from the Krous, the Wes, the Didas and the Gouros, including of course his own ethnic group, the Bete. But the region also has numerous Dioulas and Baoule farmers who supported the opposition in Daloa, Soubre, Gagnoa and San Pedro, making the community votes in the west very important.[24]

Aware of this challenge, Gbagbo was the only candidate among the three last contenders who refused to base his campaign on the identity issues during the 2010 campaign, whether it was about religion or ethnicity as his electorate was far more inclusive, far more about trans-community.

As former U.S Ambassador Wanda Nesbitt comments, the FPI of Gbagbo should join one of the major political parties to triumph through community vote. According to the Diplomat, given the ethnic proximity, the electors from PDCI would vote for Gbagbo rather than the RDR and Ouattara, the man from the north.[25] Gbagbo invested in the Baoule vote, knowing that it was impossible to win an election in Cote d'Ivoire without the support of the Baoule from the south, the ethnic group of former President Bedie. He persuaded the Baoule to vote against Ouattara. Unfortunately for him, most Baoule voted for Ouattara.

Certainly, Gbagbo got the huge disadvantage of being the incumbent President. Therefore his success was overshadowed by the crisis. He has achieved a number of good outcomes. Although people were expecting more from him and he probably performed poorly during the televised debate, the Baoule vote did not work in his favour. There are a number of other factors that should be taken into account. This included the credibility of the candidate and his capacity to convince. Far more importantly, the intercommunity vote played a crucial role.

In Cote d'Ivoire, community vote is becoming fundamental. Following events such as the Baoule vote for PDCI in Bete land in 1995, the so-called 1999 coup d'etat against the Baoule or the 2002 civil war based on ethnicity, ethnic groups within the national community are important elements determining the voters' choice.

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[22] He also indicated the need to form a coalition in order to win an electoral majority.

[23] It has been argued that the increase of the ethnic-based discrimination and the increased number of Ivorian candidates for public office has allowed ethnicity to persist and play an important role in Cote d'Ivoire politics.

[24] People from Mama, Gbagbo's village were certain that their champion would win the last election. See Jeune Afrique: La bataille de l'ouest n'est pas gagne pour Laurent Gbagbo, 27 November 2010, www.jeuneafrique.com (accessed 29 November 2010).

[25] This statement was from a memo sent by the Diplomat in Washington, leaked by J. Assange, in Ivoir Info, Elections 2010, 5 September 2011, www.abidjan.net, (accessed 10 December 2011).

Analysis of the ethnic factor

According to Ian McAllister, an election should be fought on policies as a matter of principle because it is the battle of ideas[26], but Cote d'Ivoire politics is not driven by policy. Ivorian voters are influenced by ethnicity in terms of voting behaviour similar to their African counterparts. The first round of the election once again confirmed that democracy in Cote d'Ivoire is above all about "ethnomathematics."[27] This confirmed the existence of three ethnic blocs so therefore three political blocs in Cote d'Ivoire.[28]

For the outgoing President from the FPI Laurent Gbagbo, Bete (west) who was elected in 2000 following a huge electoral fraud according to the opposition, the result was not particularly encouraging. While he was certain that he would win on the first round, Gbagbo only managed to score 36% and was forced to go to the *ballotage,* second round. The only good news for him was that he scored more than 12% outside his ethnic base. The analysis of the polls suggested that the sub Akan groups especially the small Akan group known as the coast people where his wife Simone comes from, partly voted (10%) for him.[29]

This included the "detribalised" electorate from Abidjan region which felt close to him because of his nationalist approach and anti-French rhetoric. Despite Abidjan support, Gbagbo had weak support nationally as he scored only 50% in four regions out of nineteen. As a result, he did not do so well in the centre of the country. The results in the north were also alarming as he obtained only between 2% and 9% of the votes.[30]

The second loser of the first round was Henri Konan Bedie, Baoule (centre) 25% at the polls. As a strong promoter of "Akanite", the concept of belonging to a specific and superior ethnic group he was hoping to collect all the 40% of the Akan votes. Unfortunately, he obtained only 25% of the votes nationally.[31]

Given that Bedie did well in the two Baoule regions of the lakes and the Nzi-Comoe region, this result showed that the Akan who are not Baoule simply turned their back on him and voted for Laurent Gbagbo. In addition to his lost in the coast region, Bedie also lost the Akan electorate in the south Comoe region, where he obtained only 20%. In the west with the Krou people, he scored extraordinary well with Baoule farmers who colonised indigenous land by scoring 41%. But as Bernard Lugan says, those results were shocking in the north where he achieved fewer than 5% of the votes.[32]

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[26] In practice, voters are able to collect the required information to make important political decision

[27] Referring to the mathematical study of a particular ethnic group.

[28] Critics say that one of the realities about Ivorian politics is that, political parties are structured around ethnicity: PDCI for Baoule, RDR for Malinke, FPI for Bete and their Krou allies and more recently the UDPCI for Yacouba.

[29] Also see Human Rights Watch, *The new racism: the politics of ethnicity in Cote d'Ivoire*, August 28, 2001,www.hrw.com (accessed 13 July 2011).

[30] To understand the effect of ethnicity on political behavior, see Dahl's theory of ethnic politics 1961, in Barreto 2004.

[31] Kessy Jacob interview with law Prof Ouraga Obou in Nord Sud, www.abidjan.net, 20 November 2010, (accessed 21 November 2011).

[32] Cote d'Ivoire: Les elections confirment la fracture ethnique, www.abidjan.net, 4 November 2010, (accessed 12 December 2011).

Although Bedie and Gbagbo performed badly in their own electorates, Ouattara who heavily relied on the ethnic votes from northerners and Muslims from (Malinke, Dioula, Senoufo, Lobi, Kulango) was the winner with 33% nationally. His performance was remarkable in four regions since he scored between 73% and 93% of the votes.[33]

Ivorian political parties, as we would expect, have sought to manipulate ethnic groups during election time to maximise vote. The most obvious example is the Ouattara case in the north, outlined above. Two observations can be made after the review of the ethnic vote. The first is that, ethnic vote does not guarantee a national election win as they all failed to win a substantial number of votes. Ivorian voters in some circumstances voted for one party in one election and for another in a different election. Known as the "split ticket voting" in advanced democracies, this phenomena highlights the lack of trust in major parties, the change of party choice in elections and finally showing a support for small parties instead and the decline of partisanship as a result.[34]

The second observation is the central role that political parties and the names leaders have made for themselves within the nation. In his analysis of the way forward for the Australian Liberal Party, Tony Abbott the party's current leader once observed that winning an election requires political parties to set up "an agenda that appears to voters' values and addresses voters' problems but is also faithful to the party's positions and principles."[35] For example, during the election campaign, Ouattara was determined to personally influence as many Ivorians voters as possible. That was achieved through meetings and leafleting. He also ensured that he attracted voters from other parties and maintained loyalty. However, community vote has become more important in shaping the vote. The next section examines how the voter identifies the party.

The theory of party identification
Since the beginning of the twentieth century, political observers were determined to examine voter's behaviour at an election. The concept of party identification is a simple and popular concept. As the key justification for how ordinary citizen's vote, party identification was developed in early 1960's in the seminal *The American Voter* study.[36]The theory suggests that citizens increase loyalty to a religious group or to a sporting team the same way they form an emotional connection to a political party. As Professor Ian McAllister rightly says, "that identification provides a crucial short-cut to understanding the political word, and to help the voter minimise the amount of information that is required to make a choice at an election, and to comprehend the global political process."[37]

A classification of the Ivorian voter preferences for the last presidential election between Laurent Gbagbo (of Bete ethnicity), Allasane Ouattara (of Dioula ethnicity) and Konan Bedie (of Baoule ethnicity) suggests that Gbagbo and Bedie were fairly supported by people from their own ethnic groups. By contrast, Ouattara was overwhelmingly supported by his people

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[33] Baoule vote, www.jeuneafrique.com (accessed 24 August 2011).

[34] McAllister 2011, 34-38.

[35] Abbott in his analysis in page x, seeks for values that drive his party while making some policy proposals

[36] Also see Campbell et al., 1960, in McAllister 2011, p 34.

[37] See McAllister 2011, pp. 34-38.

from the north, although the News poll released prior to the presidential elections had Gbagbo as the winner during the first round. Other voters who did not have a representative voted for one of the three candidates listed. In general, partisanship has become less relevant during voting.

But according to FPI powerbroker and former Ivorian Ambassador to the UN Jean-Jacques Bechio, during the 2010 election, the north did not go for a an ethnic vote in a sociological and anthropological sense, they were victims that were forced to vote the candidate from the north, namely Ouattara.[38]

If we accept the fact that ethnic vote exists because of a high concentration of ethnic voters in the north for example, the next problem is to look at the extent to which these voters affect democracy.

Implications of ethnic vote for democracy?
The best way to explain ethnic vote in Africa is because of the fact that democracy is not really in people's subconscious and because the rest of the population still remains rural. In a rural world, we intend to follow a politician not for his policies but because he is from the same ethnic group. People from the centre of Cote d'Ivoire for instance say they have a "mystic pact" with PDCI political party.[39]

According to Madame Danielle Boni Claverie, President of the Union for Republic and Democracy (URD), "An election is not an issue about ethnicity, religion or even less about tribe."[40] An election should be about mastering the electoral environment and having a better understanding of the community as well as taking concrete actions. Unfortunately, when a candidate fails to do so in Cote d'Ivoire, they ultimately choose the ethnicity card.[41]
It can be argued that the ethnic vote itself is not an anti-democratic procedure as long as people make their own choice which they are entitled to. People are free to choose a candidate because he is charming, a celebrity or because he is wise or competent. People are also free to choose a candidate because they speak the same language or share the same culture. If we look at a good democratic principle, it is the voice of the people that should prevail.[42]

The problem with ethnic vote however, comes from the fact that other criteria which should determine the voter choice to select our leaders are overpowered by the ethnic vote. Our basic sense of solidarity which is based on community life style, intends to take precedence over policy and program analysis of society as well as democratic debate. As a result, this significantly reduces the chance of making the best election choice for our society. It can

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[38] See National newspaper report by Fraternite Matin, 10 November 2010, www.abidjan.net, (accessed 11 November 2010).
[39] Like many other African countries, Cote d'Ivoire was invited on 20 June 1990 to go through the democratic process in Baoule in France as requested by French President Francois Mitterand.
[40] www.abidjan.net, (accessed 10 December 2011).
[41] Elections presidentielles: Danielle Boni et le vote ethnique, , www.abidjan.net, (accessed 14 November 2010).
[42] Gilles Yabi, "Du vote, de l'ethnie et de la democratie en Guinee et ailleurs en Afrique, 2010.

also be argued that the level of illiteracy and the lack of proper education among our population are the causes behind this inclination.[43]

Conclusion

Modern Ivorian political leadership never has the capacity to persuade voters and has never abandoned beliefs about ethnicity as a means of winning votes rather than developing coherent program for action in office. What is really needed is a borderless approach to voters to win elections nationally. In other words, Ivorian politicians need to embrace a much more sophisticated approach. This incorporates looking beyond their own ethnic groups and promoting the political credibility of the candidate and his capacity to convince voters.

This paper looked at election and ethnicity in Cote d'Ivoire, drawing from the previous elections, and showing that the process of ethnicity and vote cannot be fully separated. The paper also showed that the possibility of ethnic impact cannot be fully ignored and voters' choices in Cote d'Ivoire are probably based on the politics of identity. Furthermore, it showed that while Ouattara and Bedie consistently made reference to ethnicity, Gbagbo was able to win more votes through his anti-French rhetoric in Abidjan (south), as voters have begun to choose and focusing on community vote. If in the past a person's vote was almost fixed at birth,[44] this was no longer the case in terms of casting his ballot. Finally, by noting the increase of regional ties between voters and political leaders, a close look at community vote is deemed necessary in future studies about voting attitude in Cote d'Ivoire.

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[43] Ibid.

[44] See McAllister 2011, p.207 with Inglehart's theory.

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