

## DEMOCRACY AND REALISM: REFLECTIONS ON THE CASE OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

*Yves Fauré*

In keeping with several other African states, in 1990 Côte d'Ivoire rediscovered multi-party competitive elections after a break of thirty years. The change, whilst exhilarating, evidently presents many problems for Ivoiriens and analysts alike. The Ivoirien government's decision to liberalise fully the regime by legalising opposing political views and parties was taken under duress. An outbreak of violent social unrest early in 1990 heightened domestic calls for political pluralism. The government was constrained in its ability to meet the economic demands of protestors owing to the rigours of a fourth structural adjustment programme. Discreet pressure from financial donors further pushed the government towards political pluralism as a partial solution to its problems. Whilst the changes of 1990 appear on the surface to have been abrupt and radical, they can be understood only in the context of a process of political liberalisation which began a decade earlier. Although the government's commitment to a full process of democratisation was fully realised only in 1990, the current changes have their roots in the political reforms of 1980. We must emphasise that the recent return to pluralism in Côte d'Ivoire is not a phoney or artificial process. The changes are of great social and political significance and need analysing with great care. The confines of this short article prohibit an exhaustive examination of the political and social conditions which are determining Côte d'Ivoire's democratisation. Therefore this article situates the recent political events in a historical context and then highlights both the significance and some of the possible implications of the current changes.

Two preliminary points should be borne in mind: firstly it should be remembered that political pluralism and competitive elections are not a new phenomenon in Côte d'Ivoire. Because of the country's demographic patterns, it is true that most people have known only the single-party system but, as will be explained, the lessons learned by the PDCI in the early 1950s clearly influenced its behaviour thirty years later. Secondly, the transition to democracy occurred in very specific economic, financial and political circumstances. The move to a multi-party system was the response of the authorities to particular social pressures. The authorities' response was conditioned by several factors at a specific historical conjuncture as they grappled with the constraints and difficulties of a complex game of political give-and-take, which nevertheless remained firmly under the control of 'the centre'.

### THE BIRTH OF PLURALISM: CÔTE D'IVOIRE'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The period following the Second World War was characterised by bitter political debates and struggles. Intense competition between numerous political parties resulted in fiercely contested elections. The Parti Democratique de

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Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivoirien branch of the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA), emerged from the Syndicat agricole africain at the initiative of the cocoa cultivators grouped around Houphouët-Boigny. Between 1945 and 1957 the PDCI was opposed by numerous other parties formed by Ivoirien intellectuals, professionals and trade unionists. Both the PDCI's affiliation to the RDA and its metropolitan alliance with the French Communist Party underlined its hostility to the colonial authorities, who in the 1940s viewed its growing appeal as a threat to their rule. Unsurprisingly, some of the PDCI's political rivals were parties created and funded by the French authorities, a move designed to impede the growth of the PDCI. Other parties relied upon purely local or narrow ethnic support.

The PDCI broke with the French Communist Party in 1950. Its subsequent collaboration with the colonial authorities completely changed the conditions under which electoral competition occurred in Côte d'Ivoire. The PDCI gradually established unassailable advantages over its principal rivals. Under the colonial government's auspices the party developed into a truly national organisation, co-opting many of its former opponents and forging regional alliances with local notables. Its historical base of wealthy cocoa cultivators provided the PDCI with substantial resources and the party was further strengthened by the legitimacy it inherited from its campaigns against colonial repression in the 1940s. In particular its popularity was bolstered by Houphouët-Boigny's personal stature, earned through his work in the French parliament which led to the abolition of forced labour. In the dozen or so various elections held in the post-war decade (metropolitan and legislative elections, elections for the Conseil général du territoire, Assemblée territoriale, etc.) the PDCI steadily strengthened its electoral support. In 1957 it swept the board, winning all the seats in the legislature.

Having established its electoral dominance from 1957 onwards, the PDCI simply had to manage its leadership of the move to independence. Whilst independence in 1960 brought many changes, ironically it in fact had relatively little impact on the by then established pattern of domestic politics.<sup>1</sup> From 1960 to 1980 the PDCI's monopoly of political representation, won through electoral competition in the preceding period, was gradually institutionalised. Houphouët-Boigny became the sole candidate in presidential elections and in the legislative elections voters simply had to ratify a national list of deputies. Once drawn up by the PDCI's national leadership, this list was definitive; it could not be altered, and offered the voters no choice of candidates. The 1960 constitution officially recognised the right of other parties to exist, but their role was to be clarified by a subsequent law which was never even voted on.

Whilst the institutional format of political life remained virtually unchanged for two decades, the country itself underwent substantial economic and social transformation. Free enterprise, foreign investment in industry and trade, state support for coffee and cocoa production and an abundant labour force all contributed to an impressive record of economic growth. The changes prompted partial industrialisation, rapid urbanisation and 'un boom scolaire'—widespread secondary education and the emergence of a newly educated and increasingly ambitious generation of Ivoir-

iens. The principal tool of social and political regulation during the decades of growth was an extensive network of patronage and clientelism. The state absorbed its newly educated elites into the plethora of administrative and party structures. The politbureau, the party's numerous steering committees and regional sections, the National Assembly, the Social and Economic Council, Ministerial posts, as well as the ranks of Ministerial Cabinets all provided jobs. In addition, public corporations, nationalised industries and the multitude of civil service posts provided abundant and lucrative openings for the newly educated elite. In twenty years the number of Ministries rose from fifteen to forty. The number of National Assembly seats doubled from seventy in 1960 to 147 in 1980, continuing to grow to 165 in 1985 and 175 in the 1990 election. The number of members of the Economic and Social Council quadrupled, while seats on the PDCI steering committee expanded from sixty in 1965 to 201 a decade later.

Even taking into account over 300 state-sector enterprises and the boards of the 2,500 foreign companies which all experienced a similar expansion of personnel during the period, by the end of the 1970s it was becoming clear that the state's capacity to absorb the flow of educated and increasingly demanding young Ivoirien job seekers was under severe strain. Employment prospects worsened as the country's economic and financial stability was called into question; the collapse of coffee and cocoa export earnings coincided with rapidly rising foreign debt, growing budget deficits and balance of payments deficits (Fauré, 1989). To meet the challenges posed by the growing political and economic crisis, the President embarked on a dual strategy of political and economic reform in 1980. The public sector was both a source of enrichment for a large segment of the regime's political clientele and the cause of much of the state's financial deficit. The President instigated a series of fundamental reforms involving the closure or privatisation of many state-sector companies (Contamin and Fauré, 1990). The effect was to erode the power of a portion of the state elite and remove a significant drain on the public purse.

The political aspects of the 1980 reforms came as a profound shock to establishment politicians. Much of the political class had come to view their posts as permanent sinecures and envisaged no possible challenge to their positions either from within or from outside the party. Houphouët-Boigny regarded this attitude of party officials as having the potential to undermine state power as a gulf emerged between the regime and the population. Increasingly the head of state had come to see the concentration of power in the hands of senior state officials, party cadres and civil servants managing public enterprises as posing an incipient threat to his own power. Their entrenched and increasingly conservative views were a daunting obstacle to any change at a time when reforms appeared imperative. To counter these obstacles, Houphouët-Boigny abruptly announced in 1980 a programme of limited political reforms. All candidates in legislative elections would still be members of the only legal party, the PDCI, but they would have to compete against each other for votes. This semi-competitive system had the effect of handing to the electorate the task of purging party grandees whose power and autonomy the President had come to mistrust. Competition within the PDCI was supplemented by local government reforms. Hitherto local power

had been tightly controlled by the centre through a system of prefects and sub-prefects directly responsible to the Minister of the Interior. The 1980 reforms loosened the reins of central power and during that year there were vigorous and frequently bitter elections for municipal councils, which now were granted greater autonomy.

This twin process of limited electoral reform and political decentralisation had two aims. Firstly the thousands of disputed local seats provided access to political life for aspiring, educated young Ivoiriens. This helped stem the increasing dissatisfaction and frustration of those who resented the continued dominance of the old guard, the established politicians educated in the early decades of the century. Secondly, decentralisation reduced the financial burden of the regions on the central state, which was desperate to reduce its expenditure. In the ranks of the single party the general secretaries of both rural and urban regions, hitherto appointed by the party with the President's blessing, were not spared the trials of elections, as they now had to be elected by regional party members. These political changes, operating at the three levels of the PDCI, parliament and local government, had developed within a broader presidential perspective. The political class and senior civil servants had been encouraged to invest in their local regions of origin. Numerous incentives were provided: cheap loans, new road networks, regional airports and subsidised domestic air travel, along with state aid for the construction of schools, hospitals, plantations and farms. In this presidential vision hundreds of mini-Yamassoukros would spring up throughout the country, built by a new entrepreneurial political class who generally distributed part of their own wealth, gaining the confidence of their regions without depending too heavily on the resources of the central state.

The 1980 elections largely satisfied the President's desire that political reform should inject new blood into the country's political class. Over 600 candidates were put forward for only 147 seats; of the 120 outgoing deputies, only eighty contested their seats again, and of these only twenty-seven were actually re-elected. Therefore in the wake of the legislative elections of 1980 82 per cent of those sitting in the National Assembly were new to the job. Of the 190 local party chiefs, fewer than half (ninety-one) were re-elected. At the regional level, although many of the old party leaders succeeded in being elected in their localities, the new local councillors and municipal heads were in general much younger.

Whilst 1980 was a significant break with the past, surprisingly the elections of 1985 did not reinforce this trend towards political competition and rejuvenation. There was actually less competition in 1985 than there had been five years earlier. The principal reasons are quite clear. Firstly participation in competitive elections had proved to be very expensive. If contenders were successful in being elected, the investment was worth while for some, but nevertheless many candidates faced financial ruin following the elections of 1980. The new breed of aspiring politicians lacked the resources that previous generations of politicians could command. Many had to borrow heavily in order to stand a chance of election, and those who had been elected in 1980 found to their cost that a parliamentary career was no longer as lucrative as it had been in previous decades. Deputies no longer had access to bottomless bank accounts and local budgets were so threadbare that the

perks enjoyed by the old brigade—free cars, petrol and phones—were no longer available. Undoubtedly this was a key factor in discouraging some candidates from running again for election in 1985 and deterred potential new candidates from presenting themselves. Secondly the semi-competitive electoral system operational in 1980 had prolonged and painful consequences for party personnel in many regions. Given that the 1980 elections took place within the structure of the PDCI, clearly there could be no debate or division between candidates along ideological lines. Necessarily these were elections without political ideas or programmes. Campaigning inevitably became excessively personalised as rumours and smear campaigns became the principal tools of debate. Campaigning often degenerated into defamatory and vindictive sparring between rival candidates. The legacy of bitterness left by the elections ran so deep that between 1980 and 1985 the PDCI party management was obliged to undertake a series of reconciliation meetings to patch up relations between electoral rivals.

This proved such a delicate task that the party carefully planned the 1985 elections so as to avoid the legacy of personal clashes which had marred 1980. The 1985 elections therefore took place on the basis of more restricted competition between pre-selected party candidates. More rigorous selection procedures for candidates were clearly reflected in the results of the 1985 legislative elections. A hundred and seventy-five seats were contested (twenty-eight more than in 1980), 577 candidates stood for election (seventy-three fewer than in 1980) and, of the 147 outgoing deputies, 116 contested their seats again and sixty-one were re-elected. Overall 114 new deputies were elected, giving a replacement ratio of 61 per cent, 20 per cent less than the turnover of candidates five years earlier.

#### THE CHANGES OF 1990: UNE OUVERTURE CONTROLEE

In all probability the government had intended that the 1990 elections should be run along the same relatively restricted lines as in 1985. The events of January put paid to any hopes that things could continue as before. The outbreak of violent social unrest had its roots in the government's plan to cut both private and public-sector salaries as an integral part of the fourth structural adjustment plan which the government had been negotiating with the World Bank and the IMF since June 1989. The agitation was so widespread—the urban violence was accompanied by general strikes and a mutiny by the security forces—that the state had little option but to back down. At the end of March 1990, after three months of disturbances, Houphouët-Boigny responded to the unrest with new political and economic initiatives. Responsibility for economic policy was handed to the governor of the Banque centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, Alassane Ouattara, whose chief task was to redirect the burden of economic readjustment towards the private sector, particularly to those owning private property. As in 1980 the President's answer to a crisis was an apparently radical package of political reforms. He announced that the 1990 elections would be fully competitive and open to all opposition forces. This measure immediately had the desired effect, calm was restored and twenty-six new political parties were officially sanctioned.<sup>2</sup>

In October 1990, for the first time in the short history of the Côte d'Ivoire, Houphouët-Boigny stood for President alongside a rival candidate, the head of the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), Laurent Gbagbo. Whilst the results of the 28 October election clearly demonstrated both the organisational efficiency of the PDCI and the continued popularity of the President (who does enjoy genuine support, unlike much of the old discredited political class) the real significance of the election lay in the division of votes. The results, which were clearly 'massaged', are nevertheless revealing in terms of the light they throw on the role the government now reserved for the opposition. Despite the severity of the demonstrations which shook Abidjan from February to May, the size of the crowds attending the opposition's pre-electoral rallies during the summer and the firm insistence of official foreign creditors as to the need for substantial political reform, the President's personal aim was to show that it was he, and only he, who held the political initiative.

With this objective firmly in mind, and in his familiar style of paternal authoritarianism, the President summoned the nineteen officially recognised parties to a meeting on 28 September 1990. There he unilaterally announced the holding of presidential elections for the following month. He also clearly expressed his rejection of the calls for a 'national conference' or the formation of a transitional government—two of the key demands of the nascent opposition forces. Finally, Houphouët-Boigny managed simultaneously to fuel public disquiet and to smear the new political forces by revealing that a plot to kill the Pope had been hatched during his visit to inaugurate the sumptuous basilica of Yamoussoukro a few weeks previously. The Ivoirien clergy immediately expressed their disapproval of this tactic, with Cardinal Yago, the head of the church, publicly declaring his anger that the President had used such information, which was partially true, as part of his electoral campaign by insinuating collusion between the plotters and the new opposition forces.

The campaign for the presidential elections respected the judicial formalities of pluralism but the electoral climate was far from being balanced or calm. Whilst air time on television and radio was equally divided between the two candidates, the daily news was always systematically weighted in favour of the 'official' candidate. When the opposition were refused the right to broadcast a brief critical film they decided to boycott the air waves altogether. In addition, the security forces responded harshly to the various demonstrations of protest and support for the opposition, arresting leaders of student and women's mass organisations along with trade union representatives for prolonged periods. Repression against any form of social unrest generally intensified.

The presidential elections of 28 October 1990 produced the following results. Instead of the time-honoured 98 or 99 per cent for the leader, the official count gave the President 81.7 per cent of the votes and his young challenger 18.3 per cent. Even if the President had no desire to allow the opposition to reflect fully the scale of discontent within the country, clearly neither did he wish to leave them completely alienated or embittered. The opposition parties denounced the numerous irregularities and frauds during the campaign and these were also discussed in the foreign press, notably in France. Even if we simply accept the official figures, two basic observations can be

made. Firstly, electoral support for the President had clearly been eroded. Houphouët-Boigny collected only 2,445,365 votes, against 3,512,057 in 1985 despite the considerable increase in the number of registered electors (from 3,512,882 in 1985 to 4,408,810 in 1990). Secondly, far fewer electors voted on 28 October 1990. The participation rate was only 69.16 per cent, in comparison with previous rates, which exceeded 95 per cent.

The whole of November 1990 was taken up with preparations for the legislative elections. The conditions of the campaign were very similar to those of the presidential one, with formal equality of rights between the PDCI and the opposition candidates translating in reality to a climate of violent verbal attacks and pressure on opponents. Some opponents were arrested, and access to the official media was exceedingly unbalanced. Fights erupted between candidates in low-income neighbourhoods of Abidjan (Yopougon, etc.), on the university campus at Daloa in the interior, as well as elsewhere. The day of the election, 25 November, was marked by numerous clashes involving the police. Opposition candidates were denouncing the stuffing of ballot boxes by the ruling party even before the polling booths had opened.

Overall, seventeen parties campaigned, albeit very unevenly, in the elections. Some 490 candidates contested 175 seats in 157 constituencies. A 'first past the post' voting system was used in the single-seat constituencies, which were by far in the majority. A list system was used in multi-seat constituencies. Of the 490 candidates, 234 were presented by, or claimed allegiance to, the PDCI and 217 were from opposition parties (FPI eleven, PIT thirty-four, USD twenty-one, PSI eight). The other thirteen parties were represented by between one and eleven candidates each, depending on the location. Twenty-eight people also ran as independent candidates, often ex-PDCI members whose candidature had been refused by the party. The average participation rate was calculated at 40 per cent, varying between 21 per cent and 99 per cent, according to region. The PDCI won 163 out of 175 seats, the FPI nine, and the PIT one, with two independent candidates taking the remaining seats. Seven women were elected, 114 successful candidates were new to the assembly (65 per cent), whilst only sixty-one former MPs were re-elected. Officially it was clearly a victory for the government: the opposition gained only 7 per cent of the seats, a much worse performance than had been expected after the presidential results.

The electoral season ended with the municipal elections on 30 December 1990. The councils (dubbed 'de plein exercice', i.e. no longer governed by the Minister of the Interior via prefects and sub-prefects but by an elected municipal council) are a recent phenomenon in Côte d'Ivoire. Nevertheless the elections held at the end of 1990 were fiercely contested and they were marred by the same atmosphere of verbal and physical violence which characterised the presidential and legislative elections. Violence was reported in Abidjan as well as in several towns of the interior. Of the 135 contested municipalities, three had to be suspended owing to clashes on election day; Bonoua, Saouia and Ouraghio, the fiefdom of Laurent Gbagbo, all had their results annulled. The former single party presented 234 lists, whilst the opposition fielded thirty-five lists. These included four coalitions. Twenty-nine lists were also presented 'without political affiliation'. The

PDCI won elections in 123 communes, leaving only six municipal councils in the hands of the FPI and just three controlled by independents. Official statistics on participation rates were not released but the average has been estimated at around 42 per cent. Early in January 1991 the new municipal councils met to elect their mayors. The day was also marred by violent disturbances, some of the severest clashes being between rival PDCI councillors. Following an indirect vote, only sixty-five mayors were re-elected; the replacement rate was therefore around 50 per cent. Key personalities lost their seats, including the ex-Minister of Agriculture, Denis Bra Kanon, in Daloa and Konan Bledou, a close colleague of Houphouët's, in the country's second city, Bouaké.

#### EXPLAINING THE RESULTS: THE PARADOX OF THE OPPOSITION

What are we to make of the overall process of political change in the light of the election results and the poor performance of the opposition? The results appear all the more paradoxical if account is taken of the range of factors which should have boosted support for the opposition. Clearly the depth and vigour of social and economic discontent directed against the political establishment in the streets in the spring of 1990 were not reflected in electoral support for the opposition. Firstly, during the pre-electoral meetings held throughout the summer of 1990 and at the autumn's electoral rallies the opposition leaders managed to mobilise huge crowds composed of both supporters and people simply curious about the new political conditions. During the summer's innumerable meetings, on average, the opposition mobilised an estimated 50 per cent of the crowds that the PDCI could normally expect with all the official resources at their disposal (administration, security forces, transport facilities, intimidation, etc.).

Secondly, the President himself stated several times that he hoped that the entry of opposition forces into the National Assembly would be a welcome stimulus to political debate. This should logically have strengthened the opposition vote. The President's tactic did not spring from a sudden bout of political generosity but fitted his style of government. The opposition, however much a minority, could help to control individual PDCI deputies and the government as a whole; just as in recent years he had doubled the number of his Ministers shadowed by a Minister of State, each Minister of State being charged with the supervision of two or three Ministers. Finally, if account is taken of the decentralised nature of the legislative and municipal elections, it is all the more surprising that, with more than twenty opposition parties dispersed throughout the country, none managed to make significant local gains against the dominant national party.

There are numerous possible explanations for the poor performance of the opposition and the success of the PDCI, all of which would require further research if a full analysis of the election results were to be undertaken. Evidently the choice of electoral system favoured the PDCI. The 'first past the post' elections with just one round of voting (a second round was sanctioned only in the rather unlikely eventuality of a tie) distort the magnitude of both victory and defeat. The only way such an electoral system could have accurately reflected the scale of opposition to the government would have



been for opposition parties to co-ordinate their efforts and form alliances. As it was, the nineteen parties which eventually contested the elections presented themselves in a totally unco-ordinated fashion—indeed, in many constituencies opposition candidates spent more energy arguing among themselves than criticising the PDCI. This inevitably split support for the opposition.

Throughout the legislative and municipal elections only four opposition coalitions were formed. Everywhere else the diverse opposition parties took a perverse pleasure in playing off their candidates against each other. The most striking example of this politically suicidal activity occurred in Cocody, a residential quarter of Abidjan where the No. 2 of the FPI, Abou Drahmane Sangare, and the No. 1 of the PIT, the professor of law Francis Wodie, competed against each other in a large field of candidates. The surprise victory of Wodie was essentially due to rivalries within the PDCI, where the leader of a reformist tendency was competing against a party big-wig, Usher Assouan, the deputy mayor of Cocody, long-standing Minister and politbureau member. Also to be taken into account is the fact that, in forty of the 175 constituencies contested, opposition candidates did not receive the required approval of the local prefect. Refusal was usually justified on spurious technicalities (having missed the registration deadline, etc.). This meant that in one-third of constituencies the PDCI was unopposed.

One should not lose sight of the fact that, in general, the government completely controlled the electoral process from start to finish. This was due to its efficient administrative control of the territory via the prefectorial system and its extensive party apparatus, present even in the smallest hamlet. It was the PDCI which was responsible for drawing up the electoral register, for delivering voting cards, for emptying and counting ballot boxes. In many areas members of the opposition were excluded from the polling booths. Equally the PDCI retained a firm grip on the official channels of information, radio, television and the national press. There was such evident disequilibrium of electoral resources even before the campaign began that the main opposition parties had originally decided to boycott the presidential elections in protest. However, they were brought into line by the FPI and Laurent Gbagbo, who had been long preparing for a challenge to the President. The parties decided to support Gbagbo but sustained their criticism of the biased organisation of the poll.

The low opposition score can be explained in part by the pressure applied to opposition candidates; blackmail, intimidation and the threat of dismissal from state posts were frequently reported. For example, in Daoukro, fiefdom of the president of the National Assembly and presidential heir apparent, Konan Bedie, the opposition candidate mysteriously announced he was withdrawing his candidature on the eve of the poll. The tried and tested pressure of PDCI patronage was also brought to bear on certain prominent public figures who had initially rallied to the opposition. The well-known lawyer Lancine Gon Coulibaly, who had become a popular leader of the FPI, was 'persuaded' to return to the PDCI, denying the opposition a substantial number of votes. Similarly Emmanuel Dioulo, the ex-mayor of Abidjan, who had fallen from grace during a financial scandal but retained a good deal of popular support, suddenly switched allegiance to the Union Social-Democrate

(USD), which had threatened the PDCI dominance in certain regions through a potentially strong alliance between Bété and Ebrié groups of voters. Dioulu made his dramatic return to the PDCI fold during its special congress in November, depriving the USD of its appeal,

This policy of late rallying to the PDCI and its leader was probably seen as necessary by the leadership because of the threat to the hegemony of the Baoulé ethnic group posed by the campaigns of at least two of the opposition parties. It would be wrong and misleading to reduce Ivoirien politics simply to a confrontation between Baoulé and their rivals. Nevertheless, the entrepreneurial Baoulé farmers who have brought the entire south-west forest area under cultivation during the last fifteen years have benefited more than other groups from the resources (in the political, administrative, economic and financial sense) which the President has mobilised since independence. The FPI, and to a lesser extent the USD, whose strongholds are the Bété regions in the mid-west around Gagnoa and Daloa, did aim to extend their representativeness in the south, south-east and the north. The composition of their ruling bodies as well as the electoral results they obtained show that they almost succeeded in their attempt to forge inter-ethnic and inter-regional coalitions. The USD, for example, allied itself with several prominent figures such as Emmanuel Dioulo, the ex-Mayor of Abidjan and leader of the Ebrié community, to which belong the original inhabitants of the capital and personalities from the south-eastern Akié regions such as the mayor of Agborville, recently removed from the PDCI. The FPI had significant support from the Agni region, the original heartland of coffee and cocoa plantations currently in crisis, where the party obtained more than 50 per cent of the votes in the presidential elections. The FPI also did well in the poorer areas of Abidjan, ranging from 25 per cent in Abobo, Attécoube, Koumassi and Port Bouët to 36 per cent in Cocody and even 41 per cent in Youpougon. The President and other PDCI leaders were thus concerned that such alliances of opposition parties might spread throughout the country. So from the government's point of view the policy of an eleventh-hour rallying of support behind the President had the advantage of confining opponents to specific regions. This in turn allowed the denunciation of tribalism, the classic 'custard pie' of African politics. Yet the policy worked, the northern Sénoufo region around Korhogo voted unanimously for official candidates, and out of 600 candidates originally registered for the legislative elections only 490 finally competed. In the final week of the campaign there were about 110 defections from the opposition.

The importance of the reformed nature of the PDCI itself needs to be stressed. As has already been noted, the President had long been acutely aware of the discredited nature of many of the established PDCI cadres. Houphouët-Boigny thus put his weight behind reformist tendencies within the party. Despite stiff opposition from the old guard, the PDCI congress held on 1-5 October 1990, just prior to the elections, adopted a series of substantial reforms. These provided for enhanced pluralism within the party and gave it a younger leadership which was relatively untarnished by the practices of the past. Similarly, PDCI candidates put forward in the elections tended to be younger and more attuned to the pluralist trend. The reforms within the PDCI proved particularly successful, effectively cutting the ground from

under the feet of the opposition. By reforming itself the PDCI undermined a major policy platform of the opposition—that the ex-single party was controlled by corrupt and inefficient elderly politicians. It is particularly significant that only three (out of thirty) Ministers re-presented themselves for election in the legislatures. Previously Ministers had been only too eager to accumulate posts. Even if certain members of the old guard did dare to compete they risked running against younger candidates, officially endorsed by the PDCI, as well as opposition candidates. Several leaders who attempted this lost their seats, a salutary lesson for those tempted to resist the trend towards rejuvenation within the PDCI.

The electoral results—or, at least, those which were officially published—appear to show a clear, crushing defeat for the opposition. Indeed, the scale of the defeat grew as the autumn progressed from the presidential through to legislative and then municipal elections; at each stage opposition support shrank. The former single party succeeded in meeting the challenge of the opposition. It appears to have responded very successfully to the new political aspirations and the calls for reform, dominating the political game and thus containing the extent of the shift towards pluralism.

Nevertheless the apparent solidarity of the PDCI's electoral support should not be exaggerated. In his new-year message to the population the President was certainly able to flatter himself that overall the opposition was incapable of taking even 10 per cent of the seats. But statistics are never more than the product of specific electoral techniques and practices. Undoubtedly it is more revealing to look at the overall votes obtained rather than simply the number of seats won. Detailed analysis of the results reveals numerous factors indicating that the government's victory was not as absolute as may appear at first glance. We have already noted the erosion of the President's vote. During the legislative elections, in eighteen of the seats the total number of opposition votes was greater than the turn-out for the PDCI; in a further thirty seats the PDCI vote was less than 60 per cent. If the forty-four seats automatically reserved for the PDCI are excluded, plus the cases where opponents were forced to withdraw at the last minute, and those seats where the results were fiercely and closely contested, then the victory of the PDCI is a good deal less inevitable than at first sight, despite the party's vast superiority of electoral resources.

When all this is taken into consideration, the PDCI's triumph in terms of number of seats won (on which it based its post-election propaganda, which aimed to minimise support for the opposition) can be seen to conceal a vast reservoir of resentment and deception. This is particularly so amongst young people, among the trade unions and on the campuses. It is possible to link this apparent denial of fair representation in the 1990 elections with the renewed wave of disturbances in the universities and schools in Abidjan which flared up in May–June 1991. The effects of the 'successful' elections may therefore not be as predictable or as peaceful as the government wishes. Finally it should be noted that the division between the PDCI and the opposition parties is replicated, often in a far more fundamental way, in the split between the old political class of the former single party and the new generation of PDCI reformers. In many ways this factional and generational fissure is more important than the split between the PDCI and its

1990 opponents. Undoubtedly it will be these rivalries within the PDCI which will determine the political future of the country. Fratricidal struggles within the party have been frequent and violent, in many cases more so than the clashes with official opposition forces. The various tendencies within the party are now as varied as the forces which formed alternative parties.

#### WHAT ABOUT DEMOCRATISATION?

The question of whether pluralist democracy in Côte d'Ivoire has a viable future is evidently linked with the reaction of the voters to competitive elections. One cannot really talk of an established democracy or a movement towards democracy if elections do not enjoy the active support or enthusiasm of civil society. Does society accept and appreciate the values and benefits of open political competition? If we take participation rates in elections and look at long term trends, what is striking is that *competitive elections systematically register lower participation rates than elections organised under a single party.*

In examining electoral behaviour in Côte d'Ivoire since 1946 it is abundantly clear that the periods of intense political competition (1946-57 and since 1980), i.e. of competitive or semi-competitive elections, were marked by relatively low participation rates. Of course it would be easy to demonstrate that, throughout the period of either *de facto* or *de jure* uncontested polls (1957-75), participation rates were fabricated by the political machine. But this does not explain why semi-competitive polls, as in 1980 and 1985, when rival candidates all belonged to the PDCI, attracted fewer voters than polls with a sole candidate or a single list. In addition, in the presidential, legislative and municipal elections of 1990 constituencies with open competition registered a slightly lower turnout than constituencies with only a single candidate or a semi-competitive poll between rival PDCI candidates. The turn-out in the 1990 presidentials was 69.16 per cent, against 95 per cent during the previous presidential plebiscites. In the legislatives it was 40.02 per cent, 30 per cent less than the presidentials of a month before. The turn-out varied from 21 per cent where there were several candidates to 99 per cent where the poll was uncontested. PDCI manipulation cannot explain everything: the legislative elections of 1985, which were semi-competitive and thus less open, registered a participation rate of 46 per cent. The same pattern emerged in the municipal elections: more people were willing to vote when there were fewer candidates.

In the legislative elections of November, constituencies with a single candidate represented 27 per cent of the total. But in those constituencies where the turn-out was over 50 per cent over half had a single candidate. On the other hand, constituencies where four or more candidates competed represented only 7 per cent of all constituencies where the turn-out was over 50 per cent. Of the eleven constituencies where this was the case, eight registered a turn-out below the national average of 40.02 per cent. Again, the same pattern was repeated in the municipal elections the following month. In the ten communes of Abidjan competition was generally intense, with up to five lists being presented. There, the turn-out ranged from 17.74 per cent, at Youpougou, to a maximum of only 26.53 per cent at Attecoube. The only exception was the commune of Plateau, which has by far the

smallest electorate, with just 5,221 voters (compared with 186,466 at Abobo). In Plateau participation reached 40.27 per cent but a single PDCI list was presented. Also in the municipals, of the thirty-two communes where there were single uncontested lists, twenty-eight registered a turn-out above the national average. In the 100 communes where there were multiple lists competing for votes the participation rate was below the national average. (As already mentioned, in three of the communes the results were declared null and void owing to violence.)

All the evidence suggests a strong correlation between the electoral supply (the number of candidates) and the degree of interest displayed by the voters. This phenomenon is all the more interesting in that it contradicts a number of both explicit and implicit theories of democracy. It equally contradicts explanations from social scientists and doctrinal justifications of democratic pluralism. It is claimed that a democratic political system will gradually become established in so far as it expands the representation of the diverse interests and ideas active within society. In terms of a political market, the expansion of the supply of political policies on the part of the entrepreneurs, be they independent or organised into parties, should enlarge the sphere of those interested in politics in general, particularly at the time of elections. The more diverse the entrepreneurs, the closer government should be to the various social agents. This seems logical, yet such propositions do not seem to be confirmed by the electoral experience of Côte d'Ivoire.

We can exclude the explanation that this phenomenon is simply a product of the control exercised by the single party, which is freely able to mobilise people and manipulate results, because that tells only part of the story. Some could be tempted to explain the relatively weak participation by reference to the level of political and economic culture of the society in question; many voters inhabit rural areas where illiteracy is significant. Others might point to meagre resources and the absence of a truly secret ballot. Such explanations are far from being entirely satisfying. In fact in Côte d'Ivoire there was no shortage of electoral materials, there was a vast number of polling stations; ballot boxes, voting slips and all the paraphernalia of polls were abundant. In most cases voters were able to keep their votes secret. Above all, it is noticeable that the participation rate in urban areas, where people are expected to be far more interested in political affairs, was significantly lower than that in rural areas, where levels of formal education are relatively low.

A possible hypothesis is that the high average levels of voter abstention when faced with a choice of competing policies and politicians may be linked with an ingrained political culture which values leadership and seniority. This would evidently need careful testing with more precise data, but it is certainly the impression one gets when talking to Ivoiriens. The key question is whether voters are irritated and indecisive when faced with a multiplicity of choice. In effect it is not at all clear in many communities whether rivalries (which are certainly present on a daily basis) will be openly expressed in official and public processes such as an election. This is not to fall into the trap of a cultural determinism which sings the praises of the homogeneity of African society, but to underline the fact that the networks of political domination in Africa are frequently strongly hierarchical and personalised, often forming a

monopoly at the level of the local community. In addition, for thirty years a single party has greatly reinforced these tendencies. If such is the case, the transition to political pluralism and electoral competition will no doubt require delays, adaptation and long apprenticeships.

Another challenge to the theory of on-going democratisation, and a further indicator that competitive elections do not necessarily mean an expansion of political choice, is provided by an analysis of the social and professional profile of elected officials. If anything, the political liberalisation of 1990 has dangerously narrowed the social and professional background of politicians. Over 80 per cent of potential candidates were from the state sector, and of these the majority were either teachers or university staff. It is clear also from the 1990 results that the PDCI retains its former ability to mobilise the electorate and manipulate elections even in the radically different context of competitive elections. This is hardly surprising, for the PDCI has simply resurrected skills it perfected during the campaigns of the 1950s, when it succeeded in progressively eliminating all its rivals. Significantly, the PDCI still controls the drawing up of the electoral register and the distribution of voting cards, giving it an uncontested advantage at the polls. Yet despite repeatedly denouncing PDCI malpractices throughout the autumn of 1990 the opposition was powerless to prevent them. Paradoxically, the only option which appeared open to it was to refuse to participate in open elections.

The role of foreign voters bears witness to the importance of the electoral machine. Since 1960 foreigners have been given the vote so long as they are regularly registered on the electoral roll. To the dismay of the opposition the same rules applied in the 1990 contest. In competitive elections the vote of foreigners can clearly be decisive. Non-Ivoiriens are generally estimated to represent 40 per cent of the population, although it is not clear exactly how many are on the electoral register. The PDCI's control of the foreign vote gave it a double advantage. Firstly the party no doubt awarded itself the majority of non-Ivoirien votes. Secondly its official championing of votes for foreigners obliged opposition parties to adopt slogans that were distinctly xenophobic, which was hardly likely to endear them to non-Ivoirien voters.

Finally it must be said that a challenge to the viability of Côte d'Ivoire's fragile political pluralism comes from the simplistic and frequently naive policies of the opposition parties. Particularly on economic and social issues, the opposition had very little to offer in the way of real alternatives. Failure to appreciate the complexity and constraints of the country's financial and economic realities led many opposition candidates to adopt demagogic and unrealistic policies. Admittedly, few people have been permitted to gain a clear idea of the true state of the national accounts, but if democracy is to flourish then the political class as a whole needs to have a far firmer understanding of the economic realities facing the country. A party which has absolutely no idea of the size of the public debt can hardly hope to contribute to the reduction of that debt. Such a consideration underlines the need both for far greater openness concerning the state's affairs and improved political education if democracy is to take root.

## SOME INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

Despite numerous weaknesses and shortcomings, the recent series of elections in Côte d'Ivoire do suggest the country has begun to move towards a more pluralist form of government which is based on multi-party, competitive elections. But can we really speak of democracy and democratic pluralism? No doubt one must be cautious and nuanced both in terms of the current realities of this infant democracy and of its chances of survival and consolidation. Indeed, one could easily be tempted to deny the adjective 'democratic' to a political regime which tolerates so many exceptions to the norms of respect for competing ideas and political organisations, and to the principles of free and fair voting. Some analysts have felt the need to establish numerous correlations between factors such as economic, cultural and historical phenomena and democracy. Similarly one can seriously question the way in which some journalists and Western politicians have advanced so many preliminary conditions or prerequisites for establishing the viability and authenticity of the democratic formula.

One could answer such critics in the way suggested by Schumpeter (1942). Putting aside all doctrinaire and normative definitions, and taking into account the flawed reality of electoral practice, Schumpeter proposed that 'the democratic method is the institutional system in which individuals gain the power to influence political decisions as the result of a competitive struggle for the people's votes' (p. 355). Such a definition has several advantages. It permits a typology of, and thus a comparison between, political regimes. It also takes into account the realities of leadership within political parties and the general process of political domination, particularly the supply-side effects of the electoral process—accepting that parties are essentially vehicles converting the wishes of the electors into political resources. Crucially, the definition also recognises that political competition, just like economic competition, is far from being pure or perfect. There is no illusion that voters can actively participate in political decision-making when the reality is that they can merely periodically confirm or dismiss their elected representatives. Finally Schumpeter's definition does not presuppose any particular type of electoral system—majority voting, proportional representation, etc. Without denying the fragility of the democratic construction described above, or the frauds and vote-rigging particularly in the last electoral period, one can nevertheless reasonably adopt a Schumpeterian theory and cautiously suggest that the institutional and electoral system established in Côte d'Ivoire is moving towards democracy, on the basis of this broad definition. We should not forget the sobering lesson of history, that the Western systems held up today as democratic models were established on the basis of practices that had very little to do with a democratic ethos—gerrymandering, restricted franchises, poll taxes, rotten boroughs and the like. The path to pluralist democracy is tortuous and strewn with obstacles. The current difficulties are not necessarily a negation of the democratic spirit but perhaps form a stage, albeit uncertain and contradictory, on the road towards democratic stability.

Two brief final observations should be made. Firstly, democracy has often been subordinated to the need for economic development. Without specify-

ing to what degree, in what form and according to what criteria, it is implied that as long as economic development is not attained, democracy will be a luxury for African populations. Thirty years after independence it is legitimate to turn the argument round. Three decades of single parties, authoritarian regimes, social and political violence and suppression of ideas and free speech are undeniably correlated with the economic and financial weakness of the continent. Evidently the reign of the single party is not the most efficient and obvious route to development, as had hitherto been so insidiously assumed by liberal and progressive thinkers alike, who saw it as the lesser of two evils, a tool in the service of rapid development. By a system of checks and balances relating to the control of information between political parties, the new political pluralism to which more and more regimes in Africa have recently been obliged to subscribe, may well play a vital role in avoiding obscene financial wastage, grandiose projects and corruption. From this point of view democracy may lead almost mechanically to greater realism in public and financial affairs. Secondly, as more African regimes come to recognise the benefits of pluralism, so the state apparatus, civil society and public interest will all become progressively less identified with a single party, group, faction or individual. This should mean that domestic, social and political actors as well as external observers will gradually adopt a more accurate view of the complexity and diversity of the mechanisms at work within African societies.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As well as material collected personally during numerous visits to Côte d'Ivoire (1980, 1985, 1988–90 and 1991) this article draws on the Ivoirien press (both government and opposition), party political publications and the AFP's *Bulletin quotidien d'Afrique*. The text was revised in June 1991. This article was translated by David Styan of South Bank University.

#### NOTES

- 1 For a detailed view of this period see Zolberg (1969) and Fauré and Medard (1982).
- 2 For an informed and detailed account of the social and political events of 1990 see the various articles that appeared in *Africa Confidential*.

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*Abstract*

Before independence the PDCI had considerable experience of participating in elections. Even with the setting-up of a *de facto* one-party state, elections remained a useful device in the hands of the PDCI leadership to renew the composition of the ruling elite, particularly after the 1980 reforms. A combination of external and internal pressures in the 1990s ensured that a multi-party system would be adopted but Houphouet-Boigny was able to guide the electoral process to ensure continued success for his own party. Despite this and the many inadequacies of the electoral administration there has been a real political change. Côte d'Ivoire has embarked on a process of democratisation that will eventually bring other social and political benefits.

*Résumé*

Avant l'indépendance le PDCI avait eu la considérable expérience de participer aux élections. Même avec la création d'un état de facto à un seul parti, les élections ont continuées à être un mécanisme utile dans les mains de la direction du PDCI pour renouveler la composition de l'élite au pouvoir, particulièrement après les réformes de 1980. Une combinaison de pressions intérieures et extérieures dans les années 1990 a assuré qu'un système à partis multiples serait adopté mais Houphouet-Boigny a été capable de guider la procédure électorale de façon à s'assurer de la continuité du succès de son parti. Malgré ceci et les nombreuses imperfections de l'administration électorale il y a eu un véritable changement politique. La Côte d'Ivoire s'est embarquée dans un processus de démocratisation qui, par la suite, apportera d'autres avantages sociaux et politiques.

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