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Explaining the Coup in Côte d'Ivoire

Daniel Berger

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1 Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire has been one of the most stable countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Until December 1999, it was one of only two countries in West Africa never to experience a successful coup d'état, and it enjoyed very close relations with the West, especially France. Economically, it has one of the highest per capita GDPs in the region, it is the world's largest producer of cocoa, and it is the continent's largest producer of coffee. Its stability has led many companies to locate their African headquarters there. Somehow in the last week of the 20th century, however, a military coup occurred seemingly out of nowhere.

General Robert Grueï led unhappy soldiers in a coup in Abidjan, the largest city in the country. He faced no opposition in his take-over of the city. The rest of the country, including the capital of Yamoussoukro, accepted his new government as legitimate. Within two days he had consolidated military rule to the point of being able to return cars that were commandeered by troops during the coup.

Several factors, from economic crisis and government corruption to ethnic tension and government-fueled xenophobia, contributed to the coup. Nevertheless, what led to the first coup in the country's history is still something of a puzzle. The key to understanding how such an apparently stable country could suffer an unexpected coup comes from identifying the changes occurring within the Bédié government. The government was moving to consolidate power through force to an extent previously unknown in Côte d'Ivoire. The methods used raised resentment of the government to a new level. This discontent with the Bédié government's regime change from above created an opening for General Grueï to stage a popular coup.

2 Brief History of Côte d'Ivoire

During the colonial period, Côte d'Ivoire was one of the richest French colonies in West Africa. It was home to tens of thousands of French settlers who were directly involved in the day-to-day decision making. This was unlike the situation in most of France's other colonies, which were subject to indirect rule. Independence was achieved peacefully in 1960 under the guidance of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who would continue on as president until his death in 1993.

The government of Houphouët-Boigny was highly autocratic, but corruption was kept to a low enough level that it did not appear to harm the economy. Houphouët-Boigny was also more inclined to share some power with opponents rather than repress them. No one was ever executed for attempting a coup, and one leader of an attempted coup was later made a governmental minister. However, the opposition was not allowed to compete for control of the government. The first elections in which opposition parties were actually permitted to participate did not occur until 1990.

Henri Konan Bédié became head of state on the death of Houphouët-Boigny. His rule was significantly more violently repressive than that of Houphouët-Boigny and characterized by much more overt corruption. Political opponents were jailed and, while economic growth was registered on paper, living standards fell. Privilege became even more obviously concentrated within Bédié's Baoulé ethnic group. While under Houphouët-Boigny, the country's Human Development Index (HDI) ranked about 20 places lower than its per capita GDP, under Bédié it slipped to closer to 30 places below. Average life expectancy also fell during this period.¹

¹World Bank, *Human Development Reports 1990-1999*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990-1999.

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Life Expectancy	53	53.4	53.4	53.4	51.6	50.9	52.1	51.8	46.7	

Table 1: Life Expectancy Before and After Bédié²

After independence, Côte d'Ivoire followed a free market approach to development, encouraged foreign investment and recruited foreign technicians. This worked for a while, giving the country two decades of 10% annual growth. Unfortunately, world prices for cocoa and coffee collapsed in the 1980's which along with productivity losses due to over-utilization of resources caused the economy to contract by more than one third from 1978 to 1998. The economy still remains focused on the production of primary agricultural products and the tourist trade, which accounts for more than half of the GDP.

Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Burkina Faso	Guinea
21%	26%	27%	35%

Table 2: Percent of GDP from Industry³

The strong economy encouraged high birthrates and large-scale immigration from neighboring countries. The population jumped from 3 million at independence to 15 million today, of which as many as a third are either immigrants or children of immigrants. The annual population growth rate of 4.1% from 1960-1988 was the highest in the non-Arab world.⁴ While the economy continued to grow the large immigrant population did not lead to major tensions. Once the economy began to contract, however, anti-immigrant tensions increased. The Bédié government exploited ethnic divisions to hold onto power, campaigning on the theme of Ivoirite (the quality of being Ivorian). The greatest increase in discrimination has

² ibid.

³ World Bank, *Human Development Report 1999*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 pp 186-7.

⁴ World Bank, *Human Development Report 1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990 pp. 166-7.

been against largely Islamic immigrants from Burkina Faso, who occupy many low skill jobs throughout the country. Ivoirite, however, has failed to cause even the Ivorians who are given preference to come together due to the discontent many feel over the favoritism shown to Baoulé.

3 Important Actors

Henri Konan Bédié was president of Côte d'Ivoire from the death of President Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 until the coup on December 24, 1999. He had been speaker of the National Assembly and a close associate of Houphouët-Boigny. Both were members of the Baoulé ethnic group and his succession caused many people to complain about ethnic favoritism. Once in power, Bédié cracked down much harder on electoral opposition than Houphouët-Boigny had, and Bédié managed to disqualify all real opposition before the election in 1995. The most important opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara, was disqualified on the grounds that one of his grandparents was from Burkina Faso, and that therefore Ouattara was not fully Ivorian. This also highlights Bédié's Ivoirite campaign, reserving privilege for those who are fully Ivorian. This is an especially important issue in Côte d'Ivoire because a very large fraction of its inhabitants are immigrants, largely Burkinabe, who face more discrimination than other non-Ivorians. This discrimination takes several forms, from stereotypes of Burkinabe as being dirty and stupid to the denial of government and private sector jobs.

Alassane Ouattara, today the leader of the opposition party Rally of Republicans (RDR), has been Bédié's primary challenger for power. Ouattara was the deputy director-general of the IMF in Washington, D.C. before returning home to run a campaign based on combating the corruption of the government. He was stripped of his citizenship on September 14, 1999

on the grounds that he had falsified the birthplace of a grandparent on his birth certificate, claiming the grandfather to be Ivorian and not Burkinabe. Ouattara immediately fled the country. He was followed into exile soon after by the judge who had disqualified him but later claimed to have been forced to do so by the government.

General Robert Grueï was a prominent general in Côte d'Ivoire before becoming the head of state in the coup. He was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Ivorian Armed Forces from 1993 to 1995. In 1995 Bédié fired General Grueï because of rumors that he was planning a coup d'état. He had also refused to order Ivorian soldiers to fire on demonstrators during his times as Chairman, a decision which many people feel was the real reason behind his dismissal. Grueï retained his rank in the armed services and was not considered to be a political general. He emerged as a popular leader of unpaid soldiers only after the coup began, and had not been a leader of the march into Abidjan. Since the coup, he has spoken of a quick return to power but has not yet set up a transition process. He made a special effort not to let the coup hurt the economy. He reopened the airport a few days after taking power and has continued to pay government employees and service the foreign debt.

4 The Coup

On December 23, 1999, a small group of fewer than 200 soldiers entered Abidjan to protest unpaid wages. They were members of the UN Mission in Central Africa (MINURCA) who had recently returned home to Côte d'Ivoire from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and had received neither their regular pay from the government nor their promised bonuses from the UN. President Bédié initially responded by meeting with the soldiers that morning. However, unlike previous protests this one began to spiral out of control. The soldiers looted

stores throughout the city and suburbs and also stole cars and taxis.⁵

The first sign that this was more than just a large protest came when the soldiers marched on the MACA prison. Several members of the opposition RDR party were being held there for staging illegal demonstrations against the government. While the soldiers went to free the political prisoners, all 6,500 prisoners escaped. At the same time soldiers drove through business and residential districts firing into the air, creating panic.⁶

The government insisted that there was nothing to worry about. Government official Daniel Kadja said there was “no need to panic.”⁷ Others were not so calm. The protests were described as rebellion⁸ and the price of cocoa shot up by 5.1%⁹ because of investor fears of the supply being suddenly cut off by Côte d’Ivoire, the world’s largest producer.

The soldiers’ mutiny turned into a coup the next day. Soldiers occupied the national television station and government ministries. There was no armed resistance to soldiers marching into and taking control of the radio station, TV station, airport and seaport in Abidjan. President Bédié first took refuge in the house of the French Ambassador, and later the embassy proper. He was able to get radio messages out to the country during the early stages of the coup, before he took refuge in the embassy, where he encouraged the people to resist the military assumption of power. However, the resistance he asked for never materialized, and he soon lost access to the ability to broadcast nationally.

General Robert Grueï went on the air that afternoon to announce that “At this moment,

⁵The Inter-African News Agency later reported that this was done to cover up a failed coup attempt which occurred at 3:00 pm that day. (“Cote d’Ivoire: Military coup announced”, *UN Integrated Regional Information Network* 24 December 1999.) However, no one else picked this story up and, considering the lack of resistance to the coup the next day, a failed coup seems unlikely.

⁶“24 Prisoners die during jail break after Cote d’Ivoire coup”, *Agence France Presse*, 27 December 1999.

⁷“Troops take to streets in Ivory Coast,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 December 1999, Final Edition.

⁸“Soldiers go on Looting Spree,” *London Free Press* 24 December 1999, Final Edition.

⁹“Cocoa soars after reports of unrest in Abidjan,” *Financial Post*, 24 December 1999.

Henri Konan Bédié is no longer the president.”¹⁰ He also announced a curfew and stated that he would appoint a nine-man steering committee of military officers to guide the country.¹¹ Leading generals, police, and government officials then went on TV swearing loyalty to General Grueï.¹² Observers noted that they appeared to be taking the loyalty oaths of their own free will, as opposed to through direct coercion.

The next development was perhaps the most interesting and consisted of what did not happen: the French Army failed to intervene in favor of president Bédié. France has historically been very prone to intervene in its former colonies, and Côte d’Ivoire has been very close and very valuable to the French government as a location where they could grow tropical crops for the French market and station troops with responsibilities for the whole region. They requested permission to send in more troops, but when General Grueï refused they did not invade. The 550 French soldiers in Côte d’Ivoire did protect French citizens and President Bédié, but did not try to keep the regime in power. There were at least 340 soldiers in nearby countries who were ready to come but did not.¹³ One paper reported that “French President, Jacques Chirac, had wanted to use the French 43^e Battalion of Airborne Marines stationed near the Abidjan airport against the mutineers but the socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin opposed it.”¹⁴

The rest of the country accepted the coup. There were no reports of regions claiming loyalty to the old government. Even Yamoussoukro, the capital, did not challenge the legitimacy of the new government. This show of acceptance allowed the new regime to claim that

¹⁰ “Coup,” *CBC TV* 10:00 PM ET, 24 December 1999.

¹¹ Donald G. McNeil Jr., “Ivory Coast Coup Draws French Reply,” *New York Times*, 25 December 1999, Late Edition.

¹² “Military Coup in the Ivory Coast,” *CBC TV*, 9:00pm ET 25 December 1999.

¹³ Donald G. McNeil Jr., “Ivory Coast Coup Draws French Reply,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1999, Late Edition.

¹⁴ Seidi Mulero, “Bedie Falls as Gen. Robert Grueï takes over,” *The News (Lagos)* 3 January 2000. Mulero notes that the socialists have consistently pushed for greater autonomy self-determination for the former colonies. They have criticized former French governments for intervening militarily and would have looked like hypocrites if they had intervened in this case.

it did not stage a coup but rather a popular rebellion. They continued to state that they did not enter Abidjan expecting to change the government but rather to collect their unpaid wages. It was only when that became impossible and they saw the general disapproval people held for the Bédié government that they decided to remove him from power. The lack of complaint, they further claimed, was proof that all ethnic groups supported them. Even the Baoulé, Bédié's ethnic group and the inhabitants of Yamoussoukro, were supportive of the coup¹⁵. Grueï claimed this to be proof of the hopelessness of the previous government.

By the 27th, the new government announced its intention to write a new constitution. The nine members of the Committee for the Salvation of the Republic were named, and the process of consolidating the new regime had begun. General Grueï was meeting with allies in the region such as Ghana and Gabon and western diplomats. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and France had both condemned the coup but had promised not to intervene and opened diplomatic channels. By the 27th, it was clear that the military government would not be forced out, either by internal or external forces.

The Military Government set a June deadline for return to democratic rule and has received support for the transition schedule from both the West and ECOWAS. ECOWAS even gave the coup tacit support, with executive secretary Lansana Kouyate explaining its lack of support of Bédié by stating that "Imposing Bédié on Ivoirians would have amounted to an unpopular decision."¹⁶

¹⁵Likely because the corruption and ineffectiveness of the government had reached a high enough level that they couldn't even deliver the same favors to their own ethnic group that they had been able to in the past

¹⁶Editorial, "Ecowas' Somersault," *New African*, Feb 2000, issue 382 p.13.

5 General Structural Causes of African Coups

Coups in Africa are usually explained by a combination of four factors. The first of these is the size, modernization, and place in civilian life of the military. The second factor is the level of ethnic cleavages in the society. The third factor commonly cited is the level of development of the political institutions. Finally, the fourth factor is the country's economic situation, especially in regards to the country's economic base, economic conditions, and debt levels. While there are many different models of the causes of coups, most involve at least three of these four factors with varying levels of importance.

One elegant statistical model, in that it has a small number of variables all of which are statistically significant, accounts for a large number of coups, involves these four factors. Subsequent analysis has shown that all four of these factors affect not only the likelihood of a coup but also the levels of the other factors.¹⁷ This means that even though it is possible to measure these variables independently it is very difficult for one to vary without pulling others along with it. The best example of this problem comes with the economic variable, since larger economies often lead countries to spend more on their militaries, and when the economy is stronger and there are more goods, ethnic competition becomes less intense over them.

The clearest evidence exists to support the importance of the role and status of the military. It has been proven that African militaries that are significantly more technologically advanced than other sectors of the country are more likely to stage coups than those militaries that are on a technological par with the rest of the country.¹⁸ Another component of military

¹⁷ Kposawa.

¹⁸ Auvinen, Juha "Political Conflict in Less Developed Countries", *Journal of Peace Research* May 1997: 177-195

centrality is how the general populace perceives the military. In countries where the military is held in high esteem, it is more likely to decide that it can take over the government. A third factor effecting the likelihood of the military staging a coup is its sheer size. Larger militaries are more likely to assume power than smaller ones.

Societies with severe ethnic conflict also have been especially vulnerable to military coups d'état. This vulnerability shows up most strongly in countries with two large ethnic groups each making up 40%-45% of the population.¹⁹ In countries with this characteristic, control of the government often means that the group in power has the ability to dole out the resources of the state to its members. Members of the group currently out of power see no basis for the legitimacy of the leader since he represents a group no larger than the one out of power. The legitimacy of a single ethnic group monopolizing power is much greater when one ethnic group makes up 80%-90% of a country. It is also not as clear to two large groups that power must be shared as when no group makes up more than 15%-20% of the population. When a population is so mixed, it becomes clear that no one will be able to monopolize power, and leaders often design agreements to share power.

The third important factor in explaining African coups is the level of institutional development. Low literacy rates, lack of political parties, and disrespect for democracy by leaders can all lead to the collapse of democracy. These all weaken the framework around which strong democratic systems are built. If literacy is low, it is harder to maintain democracy and the population is more likely to be swayed by ethnic appeals. When there are no strong parties, politicians are more likely to stake personalistic claims to power than when there are parties which emphasize platforms and sets of policies designed by groups of people. Lack

¹⁹Horowitz, Donald L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985

of respect for procedural norms and civic values can be especially dangerous to developing democracies. When the president regularly changes the rules so he can stay in power, or openly buys votes and rigs elections, it lessens the public's trust in democratic systems.

Dependency theory states that countries which are more heavily indebted and linked to the world economy as producers of primary products are more likely to experience coups. This is because the economic structure necessary to produce primary products at competitive prices requires low wages and poor working conditions. Therefore, a repressive government will be the most successful economically. This situation encourages the military to enter the political arena since they have been trained in the use of force. Business interests thus trade the right to rule for the right to make money, keeping the economy going and increasing trade with the rest of the world while not permitting any internal dissent.

Data on the effect of debts on the stability of countries is somewhat unclear. While being greatly in debt weakens the ability of a government to do things, since it is saddled with debt servicing, countries that appear more stable are more likely to receive loans. This means that there is actually a relatively minor positive correlation between debt size and stability in Africa due to a selection bias in who receives loans. However, large portions of the money borrowed by governments are often used to fund the military. This often helps fuel coups by building the military to a larger and more technologically advanced state than it would otherwise have been, the effects of which are discussed earlier.

6 Structural Weaknesses in Côte d'Ivoire

The first step in understanding why the coup in Côte d'Ivoire occurred is to see how the situation in the country fits the general scenario common to many coups in Africa. In

general terms the military was much more apolitical than most in the region. Cote d'Ivoire had significant ethnic cleavages, though not overwhelming ones. The institutions were very poorly developed, and Côte d'Ivoire is more deeply integrated into the global economy in goods production and indebtedness than any other country on the continent.

The military in Côte d'Ivoire was not very large. The military numbers only 8,000, one third less than its size in 1985.²⁰ The military was not known for being an important force in most public affairs: it held a respected though not revered place in society. Unlike in many countries in the region, the military was not the most technologically advanced entity in the country. The transnational corporations with offices in Abidjan were enough of a presence to hold that distinction, having a much stronger presence there than anywhere else in the region. The military had been used to disperse opposition to Bédié in the past, and General Grueï had been dismissed for refusing to order his soldiers to fire upon citizens demonstrating against the government. Thus the moderate role of the military can not be said to have been responsible for the coup.

Ethnic tensions were becoming more severe as the Bédié presidency progressed. The Baoulé occupied a large percentage of upper government positions and their region of the country, the southeast, was the most developed. President Bédié was planning to build a casino, basilica, and four-lane highway into his home town.²¹ The Ivorite campaign has divided Ivorians into the categories of “multi-secular and original Ivorians” and “circumstantial Ivorians.”²² At least 7 million Malinké have been classified as “circumstantial Ivorians” and subjected to restrictions on travel and other civil and political rights. Circumstantial Ivorians are not allowed to vote or hold office, a fact that was being used against Alassane

²⁰ World Bank, Human Development Report 1999, 1999, New York, Oxford University Press p. 191.

²¹ New African.

²² Liberia Contemporary Voice, January 2000, viewed on 4/16/2000 at http://www.republic-of-liberia.com/vol3_no1.htm.

Ouattara, Bédié's main rival for the presidency. Therefore, although the demographic composition of the population did not dictate instability, the politicization of ethnic cleavages did contribute to regime deligitimization and popular support for a coup.

The democratic institutions are also relatively underdeveloped in Côte d'Ivoire. There has never been a national election in which there was any doubt over the outcome. The government is used to allocating resources as it sees fit, expecting the people to trust its decisions. Although there was some toleration of dissent under both the Houphouët-Boigny and Bédié governments,²³ there is no history of fair elections accepted by all parties. When elections were held, the PDCI made sure they would win them. So, while there was acceptance of a certain level of dissent, there was no chance for those opposed to the government to actually win power.

The economy of Côte d'Ivoire is much more deeply integrated into the world economy than any other country in East, Central, or West Africa. It is the world's largest producer of cocoa and the continent's largest grower of coffee. These two exports combine for more than half of the country's earnings. It is also the largest cotton producer in francophone Africa. This leads the economy to be structured in such a way that these crops can be profitably grown and exported, which in turn encourages authoritarian structures even in civilian governments. Further, the slides in the world prices of these commodities over the past few decades have encouraged wages to be cut, further increasing tensions.

The economy is also one of the most liberalized in Africa. This helped Côte d'Ivoire attract business headquarters in the 1960s and 1970s when many companies put their regional headquarters in Abidjan. However, this economic openness has led to over-utilization of

²³When I was in Yamoussoukro in 1999, I saw an organized protest march go down the main street of the capital, heading from the PDCI headquarters across the bridge to the presidential palace.

resources and lack of reinvestment in the country by companies which took profit out of it. These combined with the worldwide plunges in commodity prices led to Côte d'Ivoire's economic crisis. Timber is one instance where lack of conservation destroyed an industry. While timber was a significant export during the 1980's, the country deforested at a rate of 7.7% *annually*, the fastest rate in the world, more than double that of El Salvador, the next fastest deforrestor.²⁴

Côte d'Ivoire is also one of the most indebted countries in the world. It is one of the 42 countries the World Bank considers to be a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC). This debt has helped keep the government from carrying out some policies as it devotes a large percentage of its budget to debt servicing. However, one of the reasons it was able to amass so much debt was that it was viewed as the most stable country in the region, with very little risk to investors who put their money there.

Côte d'Ivoire has suffered through a massive recession over the past two decades. The country's economic decline, while certainly very important, has been going on for two decades, and is all most Ivorians remember. Several economic indicators, including GDP finally began to improve in the late 1990's suggesting a recovery may be imminent.

Therefore, it appears that three of the four factors which destabilize a country to the point of a military coup d'état existed in Côte d'Ivoire prior to the coup on December 24th. Military centrality was nonexistent. There were few developed democratic institutions, and the president had the power to rule by decree. The economy was in shambles, though the situation had not been good for decades. There was no major economic change in the year leading up to the coup. Ethnic tension, however, was bad and getting worse. It was the only

²⁴World Bank, Human Development Report 1999, 1999 New York: Oxford University Press pp. 205-208.

major factor in the country's stability that was changing and it was pulling the country to become more polarized than ever before in its history.

7 Short Term Triggers of the Coup

Several short-term issues helped to trigger the coup in Côte d'Ivoire. Events of the few days before the coup pushed already disgruntled soldiers into a position where they felt they had no choice but to stage a coup. These issues ranged from the arrest of the leader of the RDR to inability to pay soldiers wages, to the refusal of the government to negotiate over soldier wage issues hours before the coup occurred.

One short-term issue that triggered discontent was unpaid salaries throughout the government and military. Non-payment of wages is a chronic problem in Côte d'Ivoire and is not new under the Bédié government. However, the non-payment of wages to the troops who were under UN control was a surprise to many people, and damaged the credibility of the government much more than not paying regular soldiers would have.

The refusal of Bédié to negotiate with the soldiers was another trigger of the coup. It appears that the soldiers were willing to negotiate in good faith with the government. However, after they were given the impression that their proposals would be ignored, the soldiers decided that they had no choice but to take control of the government.

The arrests of several important opposition politicians, including the head of the RDR, also contributed to tension in Côte d'Ivoire. The RDR was a very popular political movement, and the jailing and forced exile of its leadership angered many Ivorians. While it was not a new thing to have an opposition politician arrested, large scale arrests of the opposition were much more pronounced under Bédié than under Houphouët-Boigny.

8 Regime Strategy

The coup can be described as having been caused by a combination of long-term structural issues and immediate triggers. However, I believe that the most important factors were relatively recent developments that appeared to be about to become structural parts of the Ivorian political and social landscape. Discontent with what was a slow, silent regime change under the Bédié government fueled what was a very popular coup.

At the time of the coup, a host of new features were shifting the political structure of Côte d'Ivoire. First of all, the French policy of intervention in their former colonies has changed greatly over the past year. The 43^e Battalion, stationed in Abidjan, has helped put down coups in the past and its presence has also served as a deterrent to potential coup makers. It also was one of the ways the French government maintained power in Côte d'Ivoire and its withdrawal from political prominence meant that Bédié had an even greater ability to use the army for his own purposes. However, the French battalion no longer was able to play nearly as large a role in protecting the government from a military coup.

A second shift was the increasingly violent repression of protesters and dissidents. The government over the seven years of Bédié's power had been becoming increasingly more violent striking out at a larger percentage of the population. There was no sign that this was anything but a shift in how the government intended to treat its opposition. This damaged the belief among many Ivorians that if they worked hard and ignored politics they could do well economically and be left alone. Under Houphouët-Boigny, the country had been consistently rated as partially free by Freedom House after 1980, but the Bédié government was never able to get any rating other than not free.²⁵

²⁵Freedom House, "Freedom in The World Survey" <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/table3.html> accessed on 12 April

The third major shift had been the increase in corruption. The Houphouët-Boigny government was not seen as being on the take in the same way that Bédié was. That allowed it to get away with more monopolization of political power, since it was seen as being good for everyone. Now, most Ivorians believe that the government is only out to enrich itself, and does not care about actually helping the people. They also see the position of president as being more important than it had been in the past, since the president now has a greater ability to reward his own people at the expense of the rest of the country. This raises the stakes of elections to a point where the democratic process can become threatened by parties who will not accept losing an election.

This ties into the fourth shift, an increase in ethnic tension and xenophobia. The government encouraged “original and multi-secular Ivorians” to believe themselves to be superior to immigrants. They also used this as an excuse to increase internal security. Bédié gained some of the increased powers he has used against political opponents from laws designed to help him protect real Ivorians from immigrants. Unlike Bédié, General Grueï is from the west and appointed members of all major ethnic groups in the country to his cabinet. Even though these cabinet members are mostly military officers, this action has gained him tremendous support across the country from people who feel that they are only finally being represented. In general, the Bédié government represented a shift from moderate authoritarian rule to increasing ethnic tension, political repression, and corruption in the context of worsening economic conditions.

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9 Conclusion

On December 24, 1999, the tensions in Côte d'Ivoire boiled over into the first coup in the country's 39 year history. General Robert Grueï led troops who had gathered in Abidjan to protest unpaid wages. Within hours, he had control of the government and within a few days had effective and legitimate military rule of the whole country. No parts of the country resisted or tried to place Bédié back into power. Foreign countries which usually condemn coups ended up giving the Grueï government unusual amounts of respect. France, which usually reacts violently to their preferred leaders losing power, sat by and did nothing.

The causes of the coup were complex and fall into multiple categories. Least important were the small short-term events which provided the final trigger. Unpaid wages and jailed opposition leaders will not trigger a coup on their own. The long-term trends were more significant but still not enough to trigger a coup on their own. The economy had been in a negative spiral for two decades, from which it had only recently begun to pull itself out of. The respect held for elections and political parties was nearly nonexistent. Ethnic tensions have risen greatly in the past few years.

The most important cause of the Ivorian coup, however, was a backlash against the silent regime change the Bédié government was pushing. It was concentrating new levels of power and wealth in the hands of a few individuals while alienating huge segments of the population.

No one saw the coup in Côte d'Ivoire coming, because no one in the West focused on Bédié's silent regime change. Because the transition from the Houphouët-Boigny government to the Bédié government had gone smoothly, people acted as though they were still dealing with the fist one. The regime shift occurring under the new government, however, was destabilizing the country and building the foundations for a successful coup. The style of

ruling had changed enough, with the rules of access to and use of power different from under Houphouët-Boigny, that the real situation in Côte d'Ivoire grew to increasingly resemble that of most other west African countries which have suffered a tremendous number of coups. The military was increasingly under the control of the president, who was highly corrupt and clinging to power by exploiting ethnic divisions.

Most coups occur when certain economic and social conditions exist. The fact that a country has not suffered a coup in its past or used to face different conditions is no guarantee that the situation it currently faces will not lead to a coup. In Côte d'Ivoire, the situation changed enough under the Bédié government to move the country from one which was considered stable to a country where a coup could be expected to occur.

The true test of the Grueï will come throughout the next year. He has written a new constitution, which will be submitted to referendum, and has tried to include a diverse group of ethnicities in decision making. However, the act of taking power by force will make it more difficult to consolidate democracy, especially should he decide that he likes the position of head of state. Another difficulty in consolidating democracy will be the continuing ethnic tensions left over from the Bédié regime. Grueï faced protest demonstrations when he announced that the new constitution will not require the parents of a presidential candidate to have been born in Côte d'Ivoire. Also importantly, the country has never had an experience with electoral democracy. While Houphouët-Boigny did not engage in the same forms of military repression as some other African rulers, he was similarly autocratic. It therefore will be very difficult for democracy to prevail in Côte d'Ivoire, even now that Bédié is no longer in control. A return to more traditional, restrained, authoritarian rule, however, is likely.

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