# Disinformation in the Ivory Coast

## Case Study 2

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ISD | Powering solutions to extremism and polarisation

OIDH
OBSERVATOIRE IVOIRIEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

# Introduction

This short report presents findings of the second of three case studies carried out over the course of the Ivorian election in 2020. This report covers 9 July to 29 September, loosely corresponding to the process of candidates' vetting, and the aftermath of the decision by Allassane Outtara to run for a third term after the death of Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly on the 8th July . The report is compiled with the help of a local partner, the Observatoire Ivoirien des droits de l'homme (OIDH).

Given the penetration of social media platforms in the country, our focus is on Facebook as the major social media platform in the country. The analysis is primarily of Francophone posts by group and page administrators in the country, with additional data indicating levels of engagement by Ivorian Facebook users.

# Summary

The report finds

- The decision by President Outtara to seek a third term is the focus of the major part of political discussion in the period, underpinning both pro-RHDP content sharing and a range of conspiratorial and oppositional content circulated by other activists.

- COVID-19 discussions have dropped significantly, likely in favour of general political discussion as the country moves closer to the election and violence becomes more prominent. Nevertheless, long-standing conspiracy theories and misinformation around forthcoming vaccinations and the use of the pandemic as a political tool continue to be central to the debate.

- Pages and groups are trafficking in xenophobic and hateful speech, with primary examples being xenophobia towards alleged fifth-columnist foreigners such as Burkinabes and epithets for politically opposing activists. There is some evidence of wider information warfare tactics being used by groups, such as the doxxing of opponents and inciting violence against them.

- The most widely shared content during the period of study features a number of disinformation narratives, including organized fraud orchestrated by pro-Ouattara supporters with the help of the president of the CEI, rumors around assassination attempts targeting president Ouattara and opposition leader Bédié, conspiracies around the death of former PM Coulibaly, and Covid related disinformation especially in regards to the development of a vaccine. Disinformation also targeted specifically certain female political figures such as Simone Gbabgo.

- The data captured highlights the important role of cyberactivists and influencers, both based domestically and from the Ivorian community abroad, in driving the political debate on Ivorian Facebook.

# Background

The second data collection coincided with notable changes in the Ivorian political landscape. The candidate registration process was upset by the death of Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly from a heart attack on the 8th July. This event had deep consequences for the election, as Coulibaly was President Alassane Ouattara's successor, and expected to run as the current ruling party RHDP's candidate in the October elections. Following Coulibaly's death, President Ouattara announced he was running for a third term, contradicting previous declarations that he would not seek a third mandate. The move triggered massive, and sometimes violent, demonstrations across the country. Demonstrations took place in the capital Abidjan as well as in several parts of the country, including Gagnoa, Daoukro and Bonoua.

Protests were marked by material damage and violence, including internecine conflict in Daoukro et Gagnoa, leading to 5 deaths, and 104 wounded while the arrest of opposition figures signalled growing political tensions ahead of the vote.[1] A women's march in opposition to Ouattara took place on 18th August, during which a number of women, including from the Generations et Peuples Solidaires (GPS) party, were arrested by the police, fuelling further anger over perceived repression of political opponents.

Three days later on 21st August, further demonstrations took place. International human rights organisations have raised concerns about the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Amnesty International reported that the police allowed 'machete-wielding men' to attack anti-government protesters.[2] Opposition parties and movements consider Ouattara's candidacy to be unconstitutional. Nonetheless, the Ivorian Conseil Constitutionnel found Ouattara's candidacy to be constitutionally compliant.

The data collection covers the period of candidates' vetting (*parrainage*) and the registration of candidacies. Candidates must receive the formal support of mayors and local politicians to be able to run. The aim of this process is to narrow down the list of candidates, but has been received with criticism by opposition figures and political outsiders whose candidacy has been declared invalid by the Conseil Constitutionnel.

This was the case of former Prime Minister Guillaume Soro and ex-rebel leader Laurent Gbagbo, both of whom have been barred from running because of convictions by the Ivorian justice. Laurent Gbagbo was recently acquitted by the ICC for crimes against humanity for the post-electoral violence in 2010.[3]

[1] https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1029789/politique/Côte-divoire-cinq-morts-apres-plusieurs-jours-de-violences-retour-au-calme
[2] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/Côte-d-ivoire-police-allow-machete-wielding-men-to-attack-protesters/
[3] https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/09/14/presidentielle-en-Côte-d-ivoire-la-candidature-du-president-ouattara-acceptee-celles-de-soro-et-gbagbo-rejetees_6052179_3212.html

# Methodology

This case study focuses on data gathered from public Facebook pages and groups through the CrowdTangle application programme interface (API). Researchers worked with a local partner, the OIDH, to identify public Facebook groups and pages that were influential or known to be a potential source of political information in the country, including those aligned with political actors and the wider media ecosystem. This list was supplemented with groups and pages identified through interviews with experts at ISD, and expanded programmatically through keyword searches and by identifying similar or linked groups and pages. This list was reviewed by OIDH to remove pages that were subsequently not deemed relevant.

Groups and pages used for data collection were broadened to 247 for this second case study to include new sources of data identified by OIDH. Of these, 127 were active during the collection period.

1.1 million posts shared by these groups and pages between 9 April and 29 September were collected. These were categorised by OIDH by:

- Nature of the Page/group (for instance, media, political support group, cyberactivism)
- Any political affiliations of the Page/group (for instance, PDCI, RHDP)
- Purported geographical reach of the Page/group (for instance, Abidjan, national)
- How partisan the Page/group was (either generalist, partisan, or hyper-partisan)

Posts were subjected to a range of supervised and unsupervised algorithmic analyses, including comparative frequency analysis, as well as analyst-led supervised classification of posts gauging relevance to the election and relating to electoral fraud and gender. Prior to analysis, posts were classified for relevancy. Page- and group-based data collection invariably produces noise, requiring analysts to remove irrelevant posts. Analysts trained a natural language processing (NLP) classifier to identify posts not related to the election. This classifier was retrained to ensure its accuracy prior to the second round of analysis.

The classifier performed at an overall accuracy of 71% and an accuracy of 81% on relevant posts. Irrelevant posts included those about music, football, sales material, advertising and posts covering major news events not related to the election. One such story heavily present in this dataset was alleged domestic abuse and kidnapping carried out by the Malian musician Sidiki Diabité. The final dataset underpinning this case study contained 645 thousand posts (59 percent of the original data collected).

Finally, keyword annotation was used to selectively analyse a handful of key themes around the election: gender, COVID-19, hateful speech and violence.

# Analysis

## Pages and Groups

Case Study One characterised the Ivorian information space captured in the data collection over the first research period to better understand the networks of groups and pages responsible for sharing the most influential content. Analysts briefly reprised aspects of this analysis to identify any notable changes in the ecosystem as a whole: the most active groups and pages, and the top posts during the collection period.

As before, analysts began by comparing the relative interactions of groups and pages contained in the dataset to identify the most active and most widely interacted with outlets. There is a wide disparity in the levels of interaction by group or page, with some sharing tens of thousands of posts to large audiences during the collection period and others sharing just a handful. The ten most active pages and groups are shown in the table below, with their relative position noted in the final column when compared to Case Study 1.

| Page Name | # Posts | # Shares | # Comments | Position |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| OBSERVATOIRE DÉMOCRATIQUE EN Côte d'Ivoire(VERSION ORIGINALE) | 66,500 | 89,889 | 363,125 | ↑ 2 |
| OBSERVATOIRE LIBRE DE LA Côte d'Ivoire | 63,309 | 144,148 | 868,519 | ↓ 1 |
| LMP-RHDP-UNIFIE-PDCI-LIDER MOTS POUR MAUX | 41,998 | 37,147 | 226,001 | ↑ 6 |
| CPI & CI: LIBEREZ GBAGBO, BLE ET LES PRISONNIERS POLITIQUES | 37,971 | 80,298 | 257,043 | ↑ 7 |
| RÉPUBLIQUE-PATRIE-NATION (RPN) | 25,844 | 65,438 | 422,578 | ↓ 3 |
| Ivoirien d'abord | 21,241 | 91,207 | 142,351 | ↑ 10 |
| PDCI-FPI-RACI-COJEP-PIT-MFA-CDRP-EDS-UPCI-RPP-RPCI-USD-APP-PRCI- (Officiel) | 19,561 | 28,188 | 55,792 | New |
| RHDP ou RIEN | 17,344 | 87,733 | 115,830 | New |
| GKS TEAM | 14,749 | 29,985 | 41,141 | → 9 |
| LA PATRIE | 12,488 | 16,304 | 42,598 | New |

*fig 1: Top Pages/groups posting during the data collection period, shares and comments*

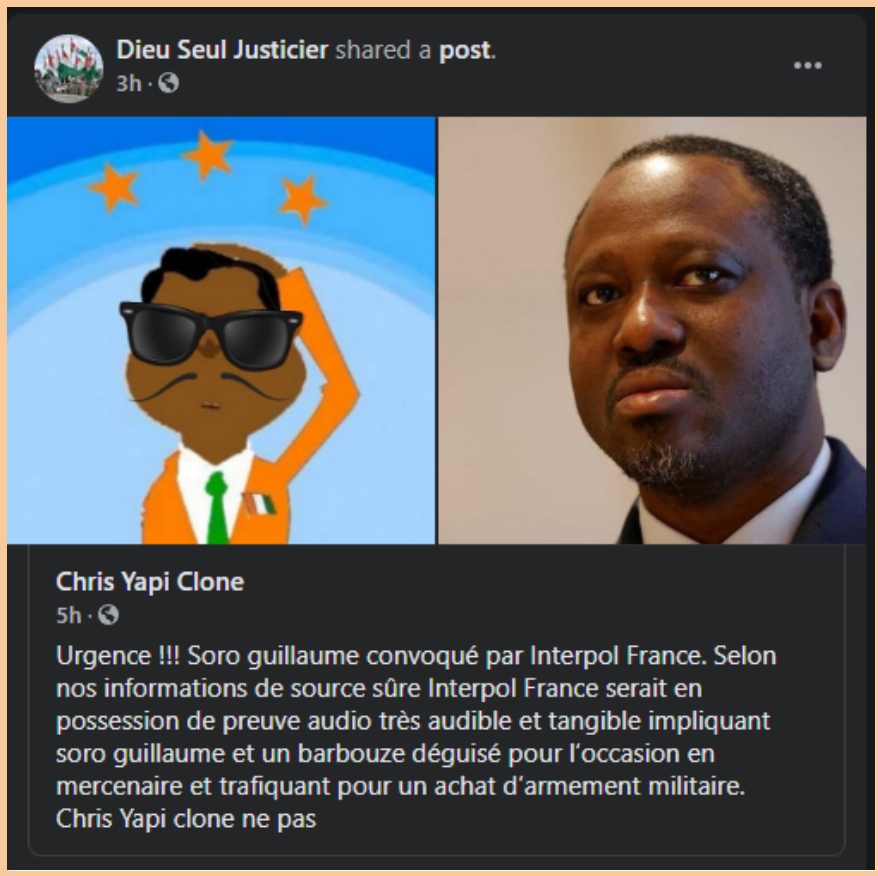
The most active groups and pages remained broadly stable across our collection period, with a small number changing places. Three new pages or groups were added to the top ten. These were:

PDCI-FPI-RACI-COJEP-PIT-MFA-CDRP-EDS-UPCI-RPP-RPCI-USD-APP-PRCI- (Officiel)

This Facebook page with over 25,000 followers is a gathering of opposition voices. It shares a variety of content, from general interest content to news items and political posts, including calls to demonstrate against the ruling RHDP.

RHDP ou RIEN

This Facebook page is dedicated to promoting pro-government and pro-RHDP content. It shares a range of content, including highly sensationalised claims and unverified rumours, including for instance claims that Interpol has proof that Guillaume is involved in weapon trafficking:



## LA PATRIE

This Facebook page publishes a range of political content spanning different political opinions. As such, it does not appear to favour a particular party, though content is of a low quality.

With the help of our local partner, OIDH, groups and pages were categorised by whether they fell into one of three possible categories: generalist, partisan, or hyper partisan. These categories were loosely defined as:

- **Generalist (48 pages):** A group/page with no obvious political affiliation, including news websites, civil society organisations not operating on behalf of a party or coalition, and discussion forums.
- **Partisan (71 pages):** A page/group affiliated with a political party known to distribute partisan content, but whose content tends not to rise to the level of disinformation.
- **Hyperpartisan (10 pages):** A group/page judged to be frequently sharing content that was inflammatory, disinformative, or false.

An updated overview of the landscape is provided for Case Study 2 below.

| Category | # Posts | # Shares | # Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Generalist | 262598 | 865696 | 2542183 |
| Partisan | 306920 | 2363476 | 2594997 |
| Hyperpartisan | 93009 | 636562 | 784037 |

*fig 2: Page/group categorisation, Posts, Shares and Comments*

| Category | % Pages | % Posts | % Shares | % Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Generalist | 37% | 40% | 22% | 43% |
| Partisan | 56% | 46% | 61% | 44% |
| Hyperpartisan | 8% | 14% | 16% | 13% |

*fig 3: Page/group categorisation, Proportional Posts, Shares and Comments*

As before, partisan groups and pages make up more than half (56 percent) the groups and pages we collected data from, with hyper-partisan making up less than 10 percent of groups and pages and posts. Nevertheless, in relation to the relative number of pages, hyperpartisan groups continue to outperform generalist and partisan pages on all metrics.

## Top Posts

Analysts repeated the exercise aimed at identifying trends in the nature and types of content shared by these groups and pages to understand the themes, types of posts and external sites most frequently appearing on Facebook in the Ivory Coast. These are the posts most frequently shared by administrators of the pages and groups in question.

We performed an analysis of the top 50 most widely shared pieces of content on Facebook during the period of study. We identified several narratives which aim to promote disinformation or polarisation:

- Pro-Gbagbo pages shared a video showing an alleged supporter of Ouattara saying he is awaiting orders from the government to kill opponents; the video suggests that the government is ready to kill opponents: facebook.com/GbagboOuRienTv/posts/2738686476364357
- Another post by the same page shows a video of police officers - the caption to the video reads: 'For those who are still doubtful, here is a clear proof that the police is working with the 'germs"(microbes in French; in Côte d'Ivoire, the term refers to criminal gangs of minors).
- One video alleges that Ouattara was the victim of an assassination attempt during Laurent Gbagbo's presidency: .facebook.com/laCôte divoireearche/posts/163795818563265
- One widely-shared video claims that the president of the CEI and corrupted police chiefs are planning to coordinate election fraud, by order of President Ouattara..facebook.com/watch/live/?v=390687515230963&ref=watch_permalink,.facebook.com/NathalieDasilvaOfficiel/posts/301753631264627/
- Several messages argue that a coup d'Etat is being prepared. A number of opposition leaders (mostly Soro) are accused of preparing a coup and encouraging violence across Côte d'Ivoire, as illustrated in the example below:[4]

> ***¨Urgent **¨urgent Soro Guillaume il n'aura pas d'élection en Côte d'Ivoire viens de lancer le mot d'ordre de l'insurrection tu mettras sur pays dans un kao totale **les jeunes casseur de Bangolo ***

- Another narrative is that malign actors are preparing Ouattara's asssination - facebook.com/110254013667419/videos/3180388712029288/
- A post argues that Ouattara is in fact not in Côte d'Ivoire but in a hospital in France - m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=783988452412146&id=105135551271580

As these varied and sometimes contradictory narratives show, accusations that pro and anti-government forces are planning acts of violence in the country feature prominently in the

4 https://sw-ke.facebook.com/Le-combattant-B-69-107837040733121/videos/urgent-urgent-soro-guillaume-il-naura-pas-d%C3%A9lection-en-c%C3%B4te-divoire-viens-de-lan/800116407422067/

dataset. Both Ouattara and political outsiders such as Soro are accused of fomenting a coup against Côte d'Ivoire in an attempt to illegitimately keep or gain power. Accusations that the police are working on election fraud and collaborating with gangs testifies to the distrust of political institutions in place, and how this distrust is being harnessed to spread rumours and unverified claims. With days to go before the election, rumours that the government is planning to assassinate political opponents poses a serious risk of unrest and violence in the country.

## Top Links

Analysts extracted the URLs linked to by posts during the collection period. The table below identifies those third-party sites most frequently linked to by groups and pages in the dataset, as well as showing the relative number of shares and comments those posts received.

| Site | Description | # Posts | # Shares | # Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| facebook.com | Social Media | 486529 | 3445845 | 4004458 |
| ivoiremessagers.com | News | 4132 | 109 | 75 |
| youtu.be | Social Media | 3948 | 17653 | 16132 |
| buff.ly | Web Routing | 3800 | 3481 | 5130 |
| afrique-sur7.fr | News | 3719 | 5727 | 16655 |
| afriksoir.net | News | 3439 | 3727 | 6203 |
| koaci.com | News | 2212 | 11956 | 24694 |
| operanewsapp.com | News, Low Quality | 2063 | 228 | 402 |
| yeclo.com | News | 1586 | 1004 | 1418 |
| aip.ci | News | 1410 | 499 | 449 |
| ivoirematin.com | News | 1391 | 365 | 833 |
| africanewsquick.net | News | 1238 | 624 | 292 |
| lecourrierquotidien.com | News, Low Quality | 1095 | 1090 | 1893 |
| actualiteivoire.info | News | 1081 | 3065 | 6473 |
| ivoirnews24.net | News | 1024 | 101 | 87 |
| linfodrome.com | News | 667 | 336 | 487 |
| news.abidjan.net | News | 565 | 15418 | 79371 |
| www.opr.news | News, Low Quality | 495 | 63 | 78 |
| directinfos-abidjan.ci | News | 361 | 101 | 79 |
| businessactuality.com | News | 353 | 119 | 59 |

*fig 4: Top links, posts, shares and comments*

This list is broadly unchanged by comparison to Case Study 1. As before, the vast majority of links are to news websites, with a number of low quality news sources identified by OIDH as a place where disinformation is frequently found still represented.

Analysts also filtered the data to known state-sponsored media outlets, focusing on Russia and China. Only two such websites appear in the data: Sputnik.fr was the most frequently linked to by groups and pages, appearing 79 times on 30 groups and pages. Francais.rt.com appeared just 3 times. In one change from the previous collection period, a small number of posts linking to Chinese state media outlets were shared among the pages and groups. 5 pages and groups linked to CGTN Francais, with posts celebrating Chinese achievements in state diplomacy and technology.[5]

Finally, effort was made to identify efforts to move discussions into closed platforms. During this period, only 16 posts in 14 groups and pages shared links to WhatsApp conversations. This represents a significant drop from 237 links during the previous collection period: it is not clear why links to WhatsApp groups were so infrequently shared during this period.

Analysts also reviewed the most widely shared URLs, focusing on URLs which had been shared more than 200 times on Facebook. We analysed 16 URLs, several of which were posted by the anti-government activist Souley de Paris. Content featuring Guillaume Soro was highly prominent in the dataset, making up close to one in ten posts in the period. The most shared piece of content was a video of one of his press conferences (434 shares) and the fourth most shared URL was a TV interview with the candidate (346 shares).

Overall the dataset of most shared URLs was divided between pro and anti-Ouattara content, a reflection of the polarisation surrounding the current president. The main narratives appearing in anti and pro-Ouattara content are presented below.

- Anti-Ouattara content:
    - A video from the official account of Charles Blé Goudé[6] (a pro-Laurent Gbabgo , candidate) shows Blé Goudé calling for the elections to be postponed amid what he identifies as increased risk of political violence;
    - An interview of Soro on afriquemedia tv shows[7] the candidate stating that Ouattara never promoted reconciliation after the 2010 violence, and arguing that Côte d'Ivoire is not a democracy;
    - A video produced by Souley de Paris[8] (fifth in numbers of shares with 310 shares) features the activist arguing that there is a coup going on in Côte d'Ivoire and that Ouattara's decision to run for a third term is unconstitutional.

[5] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=235049734198209&ref=watch_permalink
[6] https://www.facebook.com/goudeblecharles/videos/788816988533873/

[7] https://www.facebook.com/afriquemedia/videos/696901291178815/
[8] https://www.facebook.com/104422641229982/videos/756141591886161/

The video also claims that Côte d'Ivoire's Conseil Constitutionnel is complicit with the coup.

> *« URGENT: COUP D'ÉTAT EN Côte d'Ivoire.*
> *LE CONSEIL CONSTITUTIONNEL A VALIDÉ LE COUP D'ÉTAT DE OUATTARA*

- Pro-Ouattara content
  - A video featuring influencer Johnny Patcheko[9] argues that any accusation that Ouattara is abusing human rights is fraudulent. Patcheko argues that Gbabgo should face international courts for the violence that took place in 2010, adding that he is to blame for 3,000 deaths;
  - In another video Patcheko[10] gives his take on an interview by Soro, accusing him of being incompetent and a liar.

## Posts over Time

Posts were again plotted over time to identify moments of high activity during the collection period.

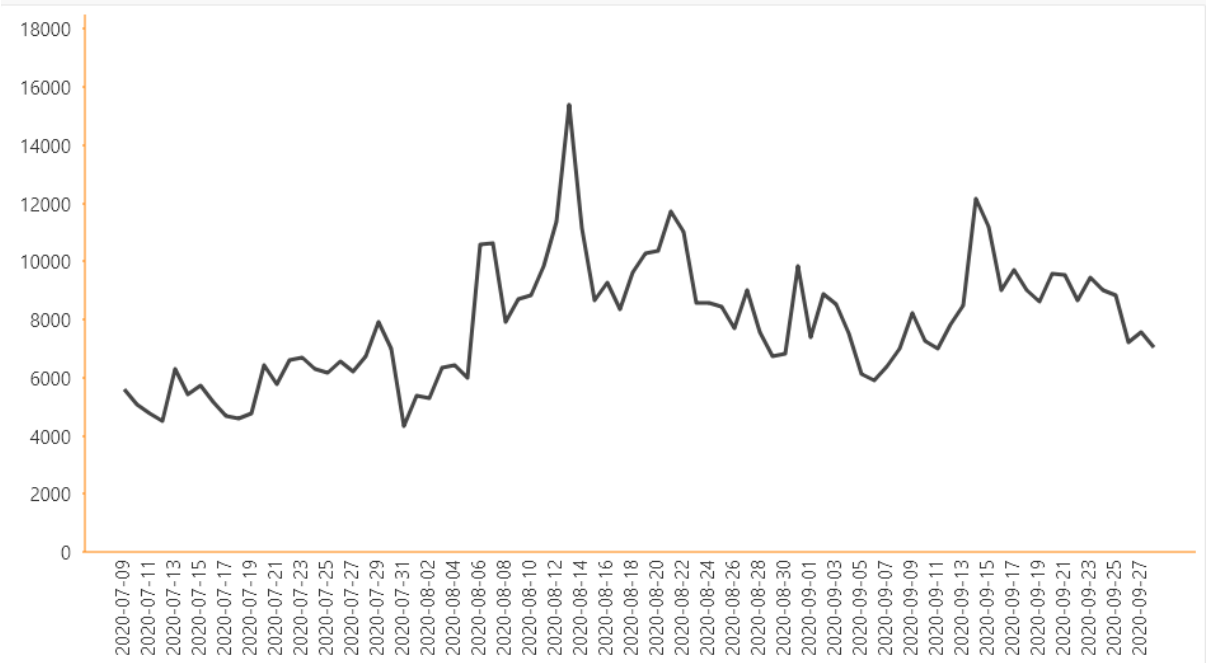



*fig 5: Volume of Posts over Time*

[9] https://www.facebook.com/Johnnypatcheko358/videos/348950416468550/
[10] https://www.facebook.com/Johnnypatcheko358/videos/360935998602565/

Posts in the ecosystem peaked at 15,411 on the 13th August 2020 with the sharing of a live protest video by the Front Populaire Ivoirien.[11] The video was shared 402 times within the dataset alone, across 43 of the pages. The video follows an opposition protest in Bonoua, which has been one of the focus points of anti-government protests against Ouattara's decision to seek a third term. The video shows large crowds demonstrating and tensions running high. It was widely reshared across the Ivorian social media ecosystem, including by 43 of the pages and groups from which data was collected.

On the same day, a number of videos produced by Isaac Koffi, a self-described pro-democratic freedom fighter, were also shared by dozens of pages and groups.[12] Koffi is a supporter of the PDCI opposition party and its president Henri Konan-Bédié. Koffi's videos warned of alleged plans to arrest his candidate and condemn Ouattara's presidency as an example of dictatorship.

> 🛑*URGENT:*
>
> 🔥*PROJET D'ARRESTATION DU PRÉSIDENT BEDIÉ EN COURS!!*
>
> 🔥*SOUTIEN AUX VICTIMES DU DICTATEUR DRAMANE OUATTARA*
>
> 🔥 *NOUS NE LÂCHERONS PLUS RIEN :DRAMANE DOIT PARTIR*[13]

The second peak took place on 14th September, which saw 12,148 posts in a day, driven by another video from Ivorian opposition influencer Souley de Paris, the page with 96,000 followers identified in Case Study 1.[14] The post is an incendiary reaction to the Conseil Constitutionnel (Côte d'Ivoire's institution which acts as an arbiter of what is constitutional)'s decision to allow Ouattara for a third term. Ouattara's attempt to stay in power is described by Souley de Paris as a 'coup.'

The video[15] claims that 'the country is being attacked' adding that 'manipulation is at play' and denouncing the fact that Guillaume Soro and Lauren Gbagbo's candidacies were rejected while Ouattara is allowed to run. While Ouattara's decision to seek a third term can legitimately be criticised, Souley de Paris's incendiary tone is a reflection of growing polarisation and distrust fuelled by the president's move. While the video does not promote any overtly false narratives, talks of 'coup' and 'manipulation' veer into conspiratorial language. As highlighted above, widely shared pieces of content have argued that pro-Ouattara activists are receiving orders to kill anti-government figures.

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[11] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=298034668291548&ref=watch_permalink
[12] https://www.facebook.com/105135551271580/videos/2370602099900556/
[13] https://www.google.fr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiW8viluuTuAhWuZxUIHfhTBy0QFjAAegQIAxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FISAAC-KOFFI-le-Porte-Voix-du-Pdci-105135551271580%2Fvideos%2Furgent-projet-darrestation-du-pr%25C3%25A9sident-bedi%25C3%25A9-en-courssoutien-aux-victimes-du-di%2F2370602099900556%2F&usg=AOvVaw3UBRn6PtohhOGK8p8N84nS
[14] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=756141591886161&ref=watch_permalink
[15] https://www.facebook.com/104422641229982/videos/756141591886161/

*URGENT 👉COUP D'ÉTAT EN Côte d'Ivoire*

*👉👉👉LE CONSEIL CONSTITUTIONNEL A VALIDÉ LE COUP D'ÉTAT DE OUATTARA*

*👉👉👉GBAGBO LAURENT, GUILLAUME SORO, MAMADOU KOULIBALY... EXCLUS*

Finally, the death of Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly on the 8th July was the subject of 15,000 posts, peaking the day the data collection began where they made up 31 percent of posts, then tailing off over time. A second peak is associated with the former Prime Minister's funeral. These posts are shown in red below.

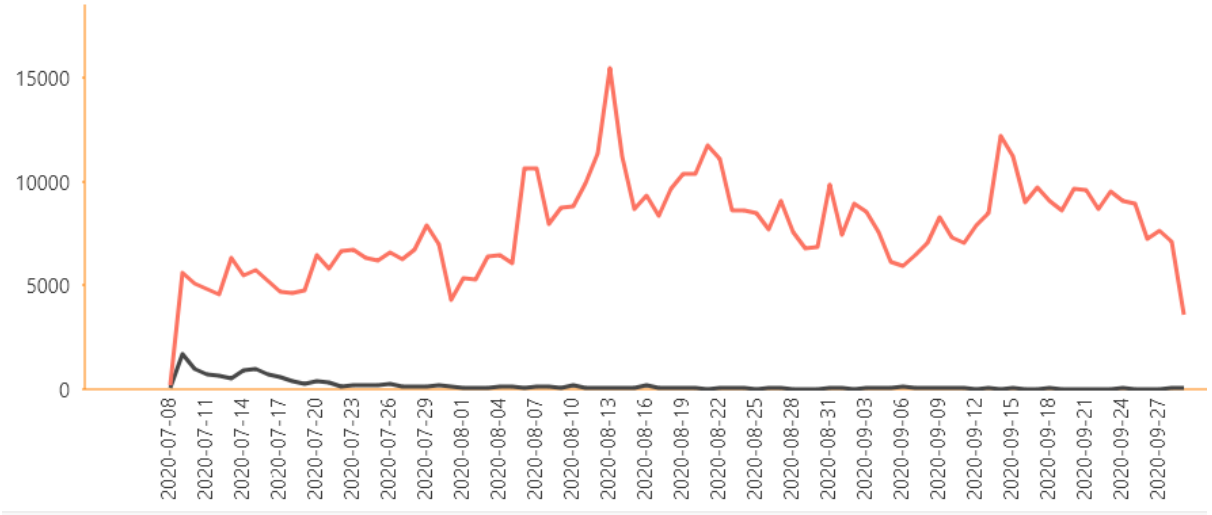


*fig 6: Volume of Posts over Time (Overall & Posts Referring to Coulibaly)*

In the days following Coulibaly's death, the groups and pages in the data collection primarily shared news reportage on the immediate aftermath, including a range of special reports from established media outlets. In the weeks, that follow, however, there are a range of conspiratorial posts that are widely shared across the pages, including accusations of murder and sorcery both within and without the RHDP. The following posts illustrate some of the disinformation narratives we identified. They include claims that Ouattara is responsible for Coulibaly's death.[16]

*Le premier responsable de la mort d'Amadou Gon-Coulibaly est le Président Ouattara lui-même!*

[16] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1599727813492591/permalink/2033250736806961

*On ne devrait plus se faire des illusions au sujet d'Alassane ouattara. Il a montré à tous, y compris à ceux qui l'ont installé au pouvoir, qu'il est un mystificateur tyrannique, incapable de se hisser à la hauteur de la fonction de chef d'État pour réconcilier les ivoiriens… En fait, ce qui compte aujourd'hui pour lui, c'est comment protéger ses arrières, l'énorme patrimoine économique et financier acquis par le clan au cours de sa gouvernance. Ce plan semble hypothéqué par la disparition brutale du "dauphin" GON COULIBALY. C'est la panique à bord. Le seul plan B qui reste, c'est ALASSANE OUATTARA lui-même.*

As before, those posts with the widest circulation around the Ivorian Facebook ecosystem during the collection period were identified. These are shown in the table below.

| Post Text | # Times Posted | # Groups/Pages Posted To |
|---|---|---|
| GUILLAUME SORO EN DIRECT SUR AFRIQUE MEDIA : LE GRAND DEBALLAGE | 480 | 52 |
| IVOIRIENS L'HEURE EST TRÈS GRAVE PHARAON 👉ZOKOU EST CANDIDAT | 360 | 48 |
| 🛑Direct \| Annonce par le Conseil Constitutionnel de la liste des candidats retenus pour la Présidentielle du 31 octobre. #RTIinfo | 187 | 48 |
| 🛑Côte d'Ivoire L'HEURE EST GRAVE: 🛑L'HEURE EST TRÈS TRÈS GRAAAVE: ⭕DÉCLARATION DU CARDINAL KUTWA. ⭕RÉPLIQUE DU MINISTRE ADJOUMANI AU SEIN DE LA CATHÉDRALE. ⛔LE GÉNÉRAL CAMILLE MAKOSSO FRAPPE TRÈS FORT. | 227 | 47 |
| Côte d'Ivoire 🇨🇮 RENCONTRE DES PLATEFORMES DE L'OPPOSITION | 263 | 46 |

*fig 7: Most frequently shared posts among group and page administrators*

These widely circulated posts confirm observations made in Case Study 1. Anti-governmental and opposition content is performing well amid controversies surrounding Ouattara's potential third term in office. As in Case Study 1, most widely shared content features videos by two influencers previously identified as being very active in Côte d'Ivoire's online ecosystem. These are Souley de Paris, previously mentioned, and the preacher Camille Makosso.

The video entitled[17] *🛑Côte d'Ivoire L'HEURE EST GRAVE: 🛑L'HEURE EST TRÈS TRÈS GRAAAVE: ⭕DÉCLARATION DU CARDINAL KUTWA. ⭕RÉPLIQUE DU MINISTRE ADJOUMANI AU SEIN DE LA CATHÉDRALE. ⛔LE GÉNÉRAL CAMILLE MAKOSSO FRAPPE TRÈS FORT* features a long rant by Makosso accusing alleged enemies of trying to silence him. Makosso then goes on to comment on RHDP Minister Adjoumani Kouassi's speech outside Abidjan's Cathedral on 2 September. The speech created intense controversy and was interpreted by anti-government forces as a provocative response to a 31 August declaration by Abidjan's archbishop Jean Pierre Kutwa, who argued Ouattara's decision to seek a third term was "unnecessary."[18] In his video, Camille Makosso is critical of Kouassi's remarks on the cardinal's comments. Makasso claims the cardinal's speech wasn't a major threat and the minister's

17 https://www.facebook.com/Generalcamillemakosso/videos/944374146076475/UzpfSTc4MTIwNjg3NTI4MDI0OTozMjkxNTA2Mjk3NTgzNjE1/

18 https://africa.la-croix.com/a-abidjan-indignation-apres-un-point-de-presse-de-membres-du-gouvernement-ivoirien-a-la-cathedrale/

response was disproportionate, and a grave political fault of the RHDP fault to attack the representative of the pope in Côte d'Ivoire.

Notably, no COVID-19 messages were found in the top five messages, as compared with two in the previous data collection. This drop in levels of COVID-19 discussion is explored further below.

## New Voices

*Note: Dan & NDI - I'm a little conscious of identifying by name some of these smaller accounts, particularly the bloggers. We should discuss prior to publication.*

The second case study allowed researchers to identify new voices that were entering the Facebook group and page ecosystem. This analysis aimed to characterise the key external outlets influencing the overall conversation taking place in the Côte d'Ivoire. These pages and groups had the widest reach, and can be judged to be highly influential in the country.

The ten most influential pages are shown below, ranked by the number of times a user shared their content, and the number of subsequent shares and comments those posts received. Of these, a number are new voices, though some (such as prominent politicians) are already subject to data collection efforts.

| Page Name | Followers | Posts | Shares | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GbagboOuRienTv | 140,000 | 6441 | 373573 | 189418 |
| pdci24tv | 318,000 | 3299 | 212217 | 185364 |
| laCôte divoireearche | 92,000 | 2376 | 183900 | 63898 |
| Silver-KB-Officiel-102406037953639 | 83,000 | 10489 | 168608 | 237814 |
| GuillaumeKsoro | 2,511,000 | 2775 | 166124 | 95674 |
| Johnnypatcheko358 | 381,000 | 1694 | 127572 | 184769 |
| LACôte DIVOIREFRATERNELLE | 105,000 | 1082 | 116904 | 95347 |
| HamedBakayokoOfficiel | 2,213,000 | 895 | 115310 | 205131 |
| abidjan.net | 1,171,000 | 1492 | 106509 | 256087 |
| deltchapo | 175,000 | 1953 | 100317 | 64127 |

*fig 8: 10 Groups and Pages with most frequently shared posts by users*

**GbagboOuRienTv**

This outlet is a highly political media channel supporting the campaign of Laurent Gbagbo. It is primarily a campaigning outlet, highlighting opposition to Ouattara's third mandate, criticising the incumbent RHDP, and celebrating opposition politicians. Although highly politically polarised, content is for the most part campaign material, rather than clear misinformation.

**Pdci24tv**

Pdci24tv similarly operates as a media channel raising awareness of opposition efforts and rallies, though in contrast to Gbagbo ou Rien, it does share scandals and stories about the incumbent political party. In recent days, this has centred on alleged attempts by Outtara to postpone the election, and raising militias to attack opposition supporters.

**LaCôte divoireearche**

La Côte d'Ivoire Avance is an RHDP media channel supportive of Outtara's campaign. It primarily celebrates economic growth and infrastructural development and the President's involvement with ECOWAS, primarily through news reports and photo opportunities. However, there is also content targeting opposition activists, accusing former Presidents Bedié and Gbagbo of zombifying their supporters, and providing evidence countering accusations that Outtara is preventing opposition supporters from holding rallies.

**Silver-KB-Officiel**

The most widely-shared non-party outlet, Silver KB is a highly active opposition supporter and critic of the incumbent regime. He traffics in pro-opposition material that for the most part is politically biased but cannot be categorised as misinformation.

**GuillaumeKsoro**

The page of the former Prime Minister, now running against Outtara. Primarily a source of campaigning material and rallying cries to the opposition.

**Johnny Patcheko**

A cyberactivist and leader of the Mouvement Progressiste Africain (MPA), Johnny Patcheko is a popular figure in the Ivorian social media space. He has recently undergone a political change of heart, apologising to President Ouattara for his previous "many inappropriate remarks" ("*nombreux propos déplacés*"). His channel is now highly critical of former Prime Minister Soro and rallies its audience to vote for the RHDP. The channel strays into conspiracy, calling for the unmasking of anti-RHDP agents. Notably, a lot of the commentary on his channel calls his new position hypocritical.

**LACôte DIVOIREFRATERNELLE**

This page belongs to Jean Bonin, a prominent supporter of Pascal N'Guessan, leader of the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI). The page focuses on high-level political discussion and commentary, with an anti-Ouattara focus. It shares a range of content, including interviews, videos, featuring N'Guessan as well as opponents and former supporters-turned-opponents to Ouattara. Bonin has previously shared false information through this channel, including news reporting the alleged closure of the Felix Houphouet Boigny stadium prior to the opposition rally to be held there.

**HamedBakayokoOfficiel**

The Facebook page for the current Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire.

**Abidjan.net**

Abidjan.net is likely the Ivorian media outlet with the largest digital footprint. It appears, however, to be politically aligned with the ruling party, mixing news reportage with verbatim political quotes from the RHDP and Outtara and celebrating infrastructural development, crediting the ruling party.

**DeltChapo**

Karamoko Mohamed Lamine is a pro-Soro activist and satirist sharing content opposing the ruling party and the decision by Outtara to run for a third term. Content is primarily jokes, live videos and memes mocking RHDP supporters and highlighting corruption and the promotion of militia-led violence by the government.

These new voices further underscore the role of social media influencers and cyberactivists on both sides of the political divide in the Côte d'Ivoire. With a few exceptions, the content shared by these accounts rarely strays beyond politically biased material and into clearly misleading content or misinformation. Going forward, social listening exercises and communications must take these voices into account: Karamoko Lamine, Johnny Patcheko, Silver KB, Souley de Paris and the preacher Camille Makosso are a central lynchpin of the Ivorian political discussions taking place on the platform. These influential accounts will be added to the data collection and analysis for the third case study where they have not been already.

## Thematic Analysis

### COVID-19-related disinformation

11,607 posts collected related to the COVID-19 pandemic (1.8 percent of posts). This represents a notable drop in the levels of discussion of the virus. COVID-19 discussions primarily focused on hypocrisy by the ruling party: first, criticism of the handling of the pandemic by the incumbent president Ouattara and accusations of fraud and incompetence by the ruling party. Opposition groups accuse the government of using the crisis as a tool, pointing to differential treatments for RHDP supporters and the opposition: while the RHDP gatherings go ahead, including large-scale rallies around Independence day, opposition groups are denied constitutional rights, including a right to assembly, on health grounds. Opposition activists accused the government of siphoning aid money set aside for COVID-19 relief.

These accusations of hypocrisy are present in the most widely shared COVID-19-related post, copied below. It is shared by an ANC opposition voice and accuses the President of inciting gatherings of his supporters in spite of the ongoing crisis.

> *Emprisonner des Députés et même des Mères de familles, exclure (à son tour) des Candidats gênants, contraindre des opposants en exil, instaurer une Commission électorale partisane, faire une « chasse aux tabourets » dans l'administration, distribuer 20 ans d'emprisonnement à ses adversaires, susciter des marches en plein COVID-19 pour réclamer un 3ème Mandat illégal puis interdire les manifestations de l'opposition, créer une milice de répression sanglante, organiser une honteuse mise en scène pour une investiture de trop... Sombre tableau de la relique de notre RDR des années de lutte pour la démocratie. Le tout du vivant et encore avec "ADO ", ce mythe autrefois incarné du prototype de dirigeant rêvé pour redorer le blason d'une Afrique des malédictions.*
> *Dites-moi, qu'est-ce qui vous change, une fois arrivés au pouvoir ?*
> *HONORABLE ALPHONSE SORO, PRÉSIDENT DE L'ANC*

A number of widely-shared posts blamed the RHDP for causing or exacerbating the spread of the virus, turning on an apparent embargo on medicine signed by the President in 2011 and quoting the President as underplaying the danger of COVID-19.

> *Le président Ouattara ne s'arrête pas là il continue et même, il dit : << on s'en fout de corona >> Cette toute petite phrase démontre le caractère inhumain du président ouattara, comment cette pandémie qui a fait des milliers de morts en Afrique et dans le monde peut être minimiser ainsi ?*

> *OUATTARA INSULTE LES IVOIRIENS. COMMENT UN PRÉSIDENT PEUT DIRE ON S'EN FOU DE CORONA.*

A secondary theme present in the data is the role of Russia in developing a vaccine. A number of posts from across the ecosystem shared news of Russian efforts to industrialise a vaccine, often in glowing terms, and further shared the news that the new vaccine had been

successfully administered to Putin's daughter. All these stories are linked to two places: Facebook-hosted videos of the news, and the news website www.linfodrome.com. Further investigation would be required to identify whether L'Infodrome is a Russian-aligned outlet.

Finally, posts continue to cross into conspiracy thinking as seen in Case Study 1. Most commonly the provenance or effectiveness of a vaccine were questioned. Two widely shared posts linked to a video produced by the Swiss misinformation outlet Kla.tv, a media organisation frequently responsible for conspiracy theory content and misinformation.[19] Worryingly, these videos were shared by nominally neutral accounts, including *OBSERVATOIRE LIBRE DE LA Côte d'Ivoire* and the *Observatoire Democratique de la Diaspora de Côte d'Ivoire (ODDCI*). The posts and video are shown below.

> *Non au vaccin* 💉

> *Voilà les moutons faite vous vacciné* ⛔⛔⛔[20]

A second post by a different Page, shared 640 times, appears to have entered the media environment through a Gabonese conspiracy theorist called Donald Empe with over 100,000 followers. The post accuses Bill Gates of attempting to bring about the apocalypse through the vaccine by exploiting the fear around COVID. The post makes use of common conspiracy tropes, including the identification of a global cabal of satanists and denigration of the media.

> *Oui, les moutons , les pauvres d'esprit qui sont manipulés par les mensonges des médias des satanistes mondialistes, je suis un complotiste parce que je suis un illuminé. Assis, je vois ce que vous ne voyez pas en étant debout sur une échelle.*[21]

[19] https://www.newsguardtech.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ENG-Kla.tv-UPDATED.pdf
[20] https://www.facebook.com/nuitcaline.carole/videos/3030033997107464/
[21] https://www.facebook.com/donaldempe/photos/a.933847300052951/2982511388519855/?type=3

Taken together, we believe this constitutes further evidence of COVID misinformation and disinformation spreading through digital platforms in the country. Misinformation centres on vaccine skepticism, and again raises the use of African countries as testing grounds for US and other Western countries' vaccination programs, as seen in the first Case Study.

**Gender**

While we attempted to search the data set for examples of gendered disinformation, using the gendered lexicon described in Case Study #1, our ability to measure and analyze the full scope of gendered disinformation on Facebook in Côte d'Ivoire was limited by our technical approach. Extending the analyses in Case Study 1, analysts filtered the dataset by a list of keywords associated with gendered disinformation and hate in Côte d'Ivoire, focusing on a narrow band of highly accurate signals. Compared with Case Study 1, the data collected in this study did not find abundant examples of gendered disinformation. One theme present in the data was a risk of social or familial degeneracy and the risk this posed to women. Posts warned of the impact Western influence and products on young Ivorian women, including a scaremongering post linking dolls to pedophilia and lesbianism.[22]

> *Bientôt des poupées Pédophiles(PD) seront vendues dans des boutiques en afrique pendant des périodes de fêtes. Et dans l'ignorance nous les acheterons pour nos enfants et pour nos petites soeurs qui plus tard chercheront à être PD ou lesbiennes comme ces poupées ou comme certains acteurs des feuilletons. S'ils le deviennent, a qui la faute? Ouvrons les yeux*

Outside of concrete themes, a number of posts insulted female politicians, usually in response to comments made by them on social media. The following posts make use of the term "kandiarousse," a word used to criticize statements made by women that are considered incoherent or nonsensical.

[22] https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=107051121022212&story_fbid=163796158681041

Spinto De Poy
23 August ·
Kandiarousse
Kandia Camara
1 min ·
Le candidat du RHDP, notre boussole, le Président #ADO, a été investi ce samedi 22 août 2020 au Stade Felix Houphouët Bobigny.
Merci aux femmes, aux jeunes et aux hommes venu en nombre pour donner un caractère festif à cette investiture.

Gissé Yapi
14 July ·
Elle a encore frappé la kandiarouse est devenir serey Die national,rhpde y'a pas son jolie deh,vous meme regardé visage qui pleure on dirais coronavirus
EN DIRECT
4 583
11:21
Amadou Ouattara
HOMMAGE AU PREMIER MINISTRE AMADOU GON....

More commonly, women in politics were mentioned in relation to a number of disinformation narratives, including unverified claims that there are assassination attempts against opposition figures. In particular, Simone Gbagbo was identified as a potential source of unrest, with multiple posts claiming she is working with violent gangs to coordinate acts of violence ahead of the vote. This message was shared by a pro-Ouattara page, potentially politically motivated and attempting to undermine the Gbagbo family.

> *#SIMONE_GBAGBO_LA_PYROMANE La pyromane simone gbagbo planifie des violences et le gouvernement se prépare pour son arrestation. Alors que l'opposition qui a appelé à la désobéissance civile n'a jusqu'ici pas donné de contenu clair à cet outil de protestation, nous apprenons que simone gbagbo a tenu une réunion avec des jeunes casseurs de Bonoua, sa ville natale. Selon mes sources - en réalité des jeunes infiltrés dans le dispositif de l'ex-première dame- elle aurait tenu des propos d'une extrême gravité dans sa tentative de remobiliser les pillards, alors que la localité a déjà enregistré des morts et des destructions des édifices publics et privés. "La libération de la Côte d'Ivoire devrait partir de Bonoua. On doit faire fi des morts et des destructions des biens. Seul le résultat compte" a notamment déclaré simone gbagbo dans des propos que m'a rapporté mes informateurs.*[23]

We also identified instances of misogynistic language targeting Minister of Public Health Anne-Désirée Oulouto (nicknamed 'maman bulldozer' for her drive to raze buildings and areas deemed to be unsafe). Posts allege that she is doing the bidding of Youth and Employment Minister Mamadou Touré's, with sexualised language suggesting she slept with Touré. These kinds of attacks contribute to casting doubt over women's legitimacy at a time of heightened electoral stakes:

> *maman bulldozer je crois que le sperme de Mamadou Touré petit marteau 🔨 t'ai monté a la Tête KO tiré sur tout ce qui bouge bebothouiii tes narines on dirait 🐷 porc la. go mazo la.*

> *Bim bam Mamadou Touré (petit marteau) enceinte maman bulldozer Fhomm goût de chaa !!🥱🥱🥱*

> *Derrière ce sourire "flamboyant" de maman bulldozer se cache le travail bien fait de Mamadou Touré (Petit marteau 🔨) Fhoum goût de chaaaa!! Bande de mazo va !! bebothouiii*

Overall, this is consistent with Case Study One: women in power are targeted, and when examined on a case by case basis the abuse is consistent with themes highlighted by studies into gendered disinformation, and gendered language is present in the dataset.[24]

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[23] https://ne-np.facebook.com/Clgrandira/posts/2781348355427747/

[24] See, for instance: Chapter 4, *ENGENDERING HATE: THE CONTOURS OF STATE-ALIGNED GENDERED DISINFORMATION ONLINE,* (Demos 2020), 25-34 (Available at: https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Engendering-Hate-Report-FINAL.pdf)

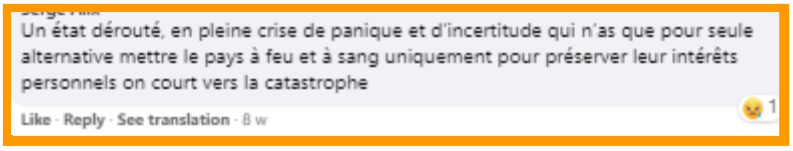
**Calls for Violence**

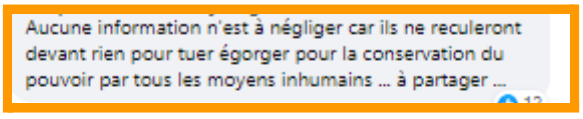
Pro-Ouattara and opposition voices have both been accusing the other side of staging a coup and inciting violence. The pro-Gbagbo page *Gbago ou Rien TV (GOR Tv)* was particularly vocal and a central influencer in our dataset (over half of the posts categorised came from this page).

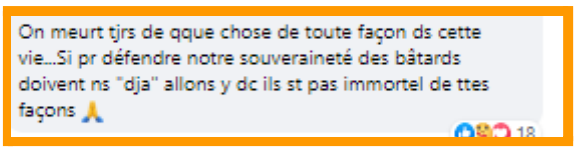
This page, alongside other opposition pages in our dataset, extensively shared content denouncing Ouattara's candidacy for a third term and supporting the demonstrations which took place across the country. Many posts supporting the demonstrations used the hashtag #rezopanacom. Some of them included calls for violence.

*On doit le chasseur vite! #rezopanacom*

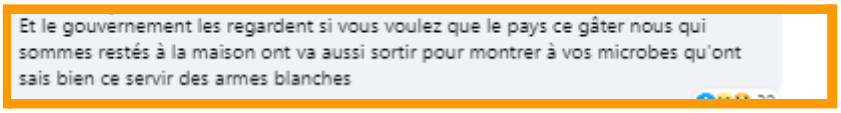
Calls to violence were frequently answered 'below the line', which as noted above is not computationally readable under the terms of the current Facebook and Crowdtangle APIs. Nevertheless, analysts qualitatively reviewed a number of calls to violence outside of the data capture capability. Consistent with theories identified above, comments are claiming that the government will stop at nothing to kill protesters and that anti-government activists should be ready to die for their cause (screenshot below). This rhetoric reflects intensive fears of and rumours surrounding political violence only days before the vote. Some comments are shown below.

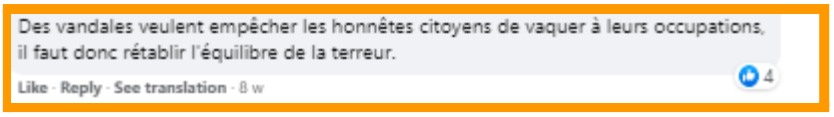


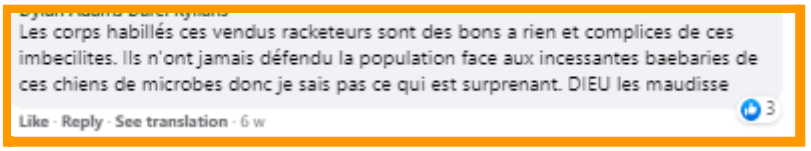


The examples below, which were comments posted under this video shared by GOR tv showing with the caption "Microbes attack protestors" encourage the use of violence.[25]



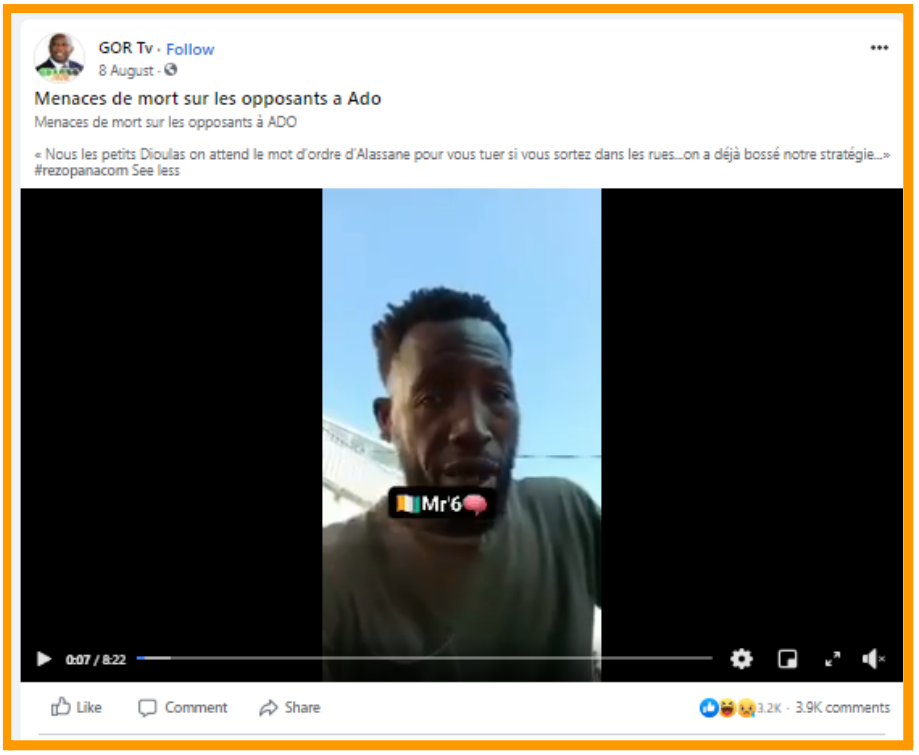




While some comments are merely sharing unverified claims, we also identified instances of hateful speech targeting Ouattara's supporters. The latter are frequently referred to as 'microbes' (germs). The page GOR Tv in our dataset regularly used the term, which appears in 9,022 posts. 'Microbe' was used to dehumanise Ouattara's supporters and justify calls for violence against them. In the example below, Ouattara supporters are referred to as "chien de microbes."

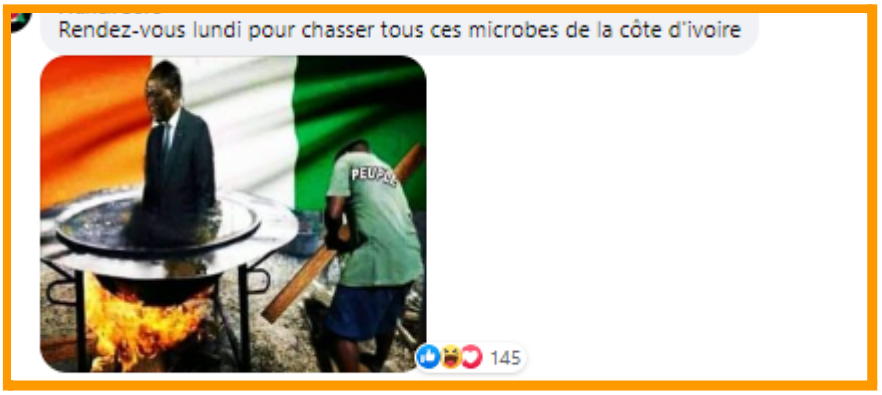



Ouattara's supporters are depicted as a threat to the country. In one of the examples below, they are accused of being paid to kill the ivorian population. This unverified claim also emerged from our analysis of most widely shared content (see above).

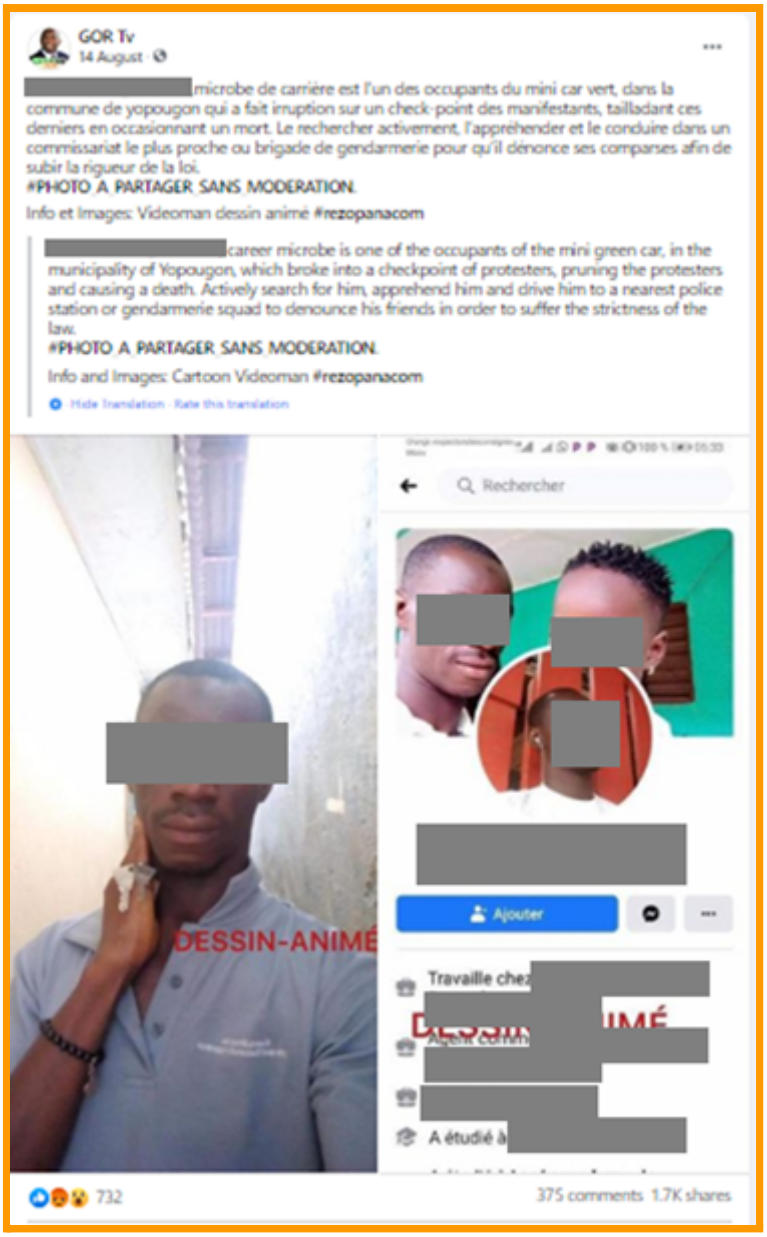
[25] https://www.facebook.com/GbagboOuRienTv/posts/2742707829295555

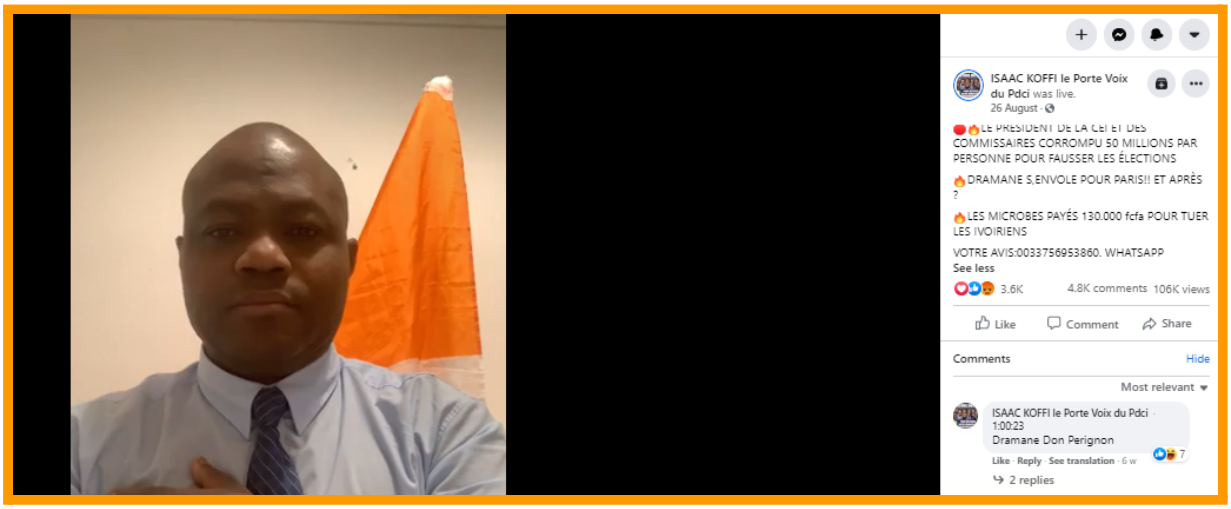



In another example, a post from GOR TV which described pro-Ouattara supporters as 'microbes' led to comments encouraging violence towards and the murder of these supporters.




Alongside generalised incitements to violence, there is evidence of open platforms like Facebook being used to doxx and direct attention to specific individuals. Some posts actively encouraged readers to track down an individual suspected of being pro-Ouattara activists. In the example below, the page GORtv named a specific individual sharing his FB page describing him as "a microbe de carriere", asking his followers to track him down and report him to the police. This mechanism entails serious risks of political violence, encouraging Ivorians to take matters into their own hands.


GOR Tv
14 August
[redacted] microbe de carrière est l'un des occupants du mini car vert, dans la commune de yopougon qui a fait irruption sur un check-point des manifestants, tailladant ces derniers en occasionnant un mort. Le rechercher activement, l'appréhender et le conduire dans un commissariat le plus proche ou brigade de gendarmerie pour qu'il dénonce ses comparses afin de subir la rigueur de la loi.
#PHOTO_A_PARTAGER_SANS_MODERATION.
Info et Images: Videoman dessin animé #rezopanacom
[redacted] career microbe is one of the occupants of the mini green car, in the municipality of Yopougon, which broke into a checkpoint of protesters, pruning the protesters and causing a death. Actively search for him, apprehend him and drive him to a nearest police station or gendarmerie squad to denounce his friends in order to suffer the strictness of the law.
#PHOTO_A_PARTAGER_SANS_MODERATION.
Info and Images: Cartoon Videoman #rezopanacom
Hide Translation · Rate this translation
DESSIN-ANIMÉ
Rechercher
Ajouter
Travaille chez
A étudié à
732
375 comments 1.7K shares


ISAAC KOFFI le Porte Voix du Pdci was live.
26 August
LE PRÉSIDENT DE LA CEI ET DES COMMISSAIRES CORROMPU 50 MILLIONS PAR PERSONNE POUR FAUSSER LES ÉLECTIONS
DRAMANE S,ENVOLE POUR PARIS!! ET APRÈS ?
LES MICROBES PAYÉS 130.000 fcfa POUR TUER LES IVOIRIENS
VOTRE AVIS:0033756953860. WHATSAPP
See less
3.6K
4.8K comments 106K views
Like
Comment
Share
Comments
Hide
Most relevant
ISAAC KOFFI le Porte Voix du Pdci · 1:00:23
Dramane Don Perignon
Like · Reply · See translation · 6 w
2 replies

Calls for violence went hand in hand with accusations - already identified above - that police forces contain fifth columnists working to undermine the country. In some instances, the police are considered to be complicit and called allies to the 'microbes' by endorsing political violence. The alleged violence that Ouattara's supporters are planning to unleash on the Ivorian people with the support of state institutions serves as an argument to legitimise calls for violence against the government and Ouattara's supporters. Police forces themselves were targeted with polarising language and referred to as 'microbe.' The first posts below emphasize the police's collaboration with pro-Ouattara forces in perpetuating violence, while the second example is using the term 'microbe' to disparagingly refer to the police. This rhetoric is promoting distrust of state institutions.

The police and gendarmerie were also presented as supportive of the demonstrations. In the example below, the author of the post claims a police source reached out to emphasize the police were on the same side as the demonstrators.

Pro-Ouattara voices have also been active, though less prevalent in our dataset, accusing the opposition of leading a coup through the anti-Ouattara demonstrations. The pro-Ouattara influencer Johnny Patcheko was particuallry active within our dataset, accusing opposition leaders (including Soro, Gbagbo, Ble) of leading an insurrection against the Ouattara regime and being responsible for the murder of teenagers in Daoukro.

To conclude, this period saw an increase in the number of calls for violence and a worrying growth in commonly-seen disinformation tactics such as the use of doxxing and hateful language. The stigmatisation of minorities and opposition supporters is explored further below.

**Stigmatisation of minorities**

Analysts looked to compare offline intelligence reports from OIDH and other partners with online conversations with an aim of identifying hateful themes and the use of hateful language. Of these, the most prominent theme was xenophobia centred on a Burkinabe fifth column operating in Côte D'Ivoire, led by no less important a figure than the President himself, Alassane Ouattara. Ouattara appears to be the descendent of a Burkinabe family, which is prompting some social media users to disparagingly call him a 'Burkinabe'

> 🔴*Urgent urgent AAlassane doit partir*
> *Je vous avais prévenu hier le Burkinabé Alassane dramane Ouattara est en train de créer une deuxième guerre en Côte d'Ivoire.*

Posts frequently referred to the President as being Burkinabe.

> *Quoi que fera Ouattara, le burkinabé président de la Côte d'Ivoire, il ne sera jamais aucun de nos héros ! Il restera pour toujours un mercenaire, un assassin, un traître et une honte pour sa génération surtout pour la bande d'escrocs chef d'État à laquelle il appartient ! Pour maintenir sa candidature, Ouattara a assassiné Wattao et son premier Ministre , Gon Coulibaly, son dauphin sous le silence de ces faux collaborateurs de la magouille!*

A video circulated by a page belonging to Éminence Maréchal Bishop Melchisedek to his audience of 30,000.[26] Melchisedek is a self-described motivational coach with over 5,000 followers on his Facebook page, dedicated to helping people 'have a better soul.' It was shared by 33 of the pages in the Ivorian ecosystem, primarily among pro-CPI & CI opposition groups. It features Melchisedek showing images of violence against political opponents on his smartphone. One of the videos shown by Melchisedek features a young man who Melchisedek argues was stabbed to death with machetes.

Corresponding to trends seen in COVID-19 disinformation, communications frequently merge exhortations to violence or self defence with apparent news reporting of internecine and community violence, particularly attempts to target Muslims and their places of worship in Côte d'Ivoire. Other posts claim to expose a foreign militia acting as a bodyguard for the President, or identify foreigners - namely Burkinabes - at the centre of interethnic violence.[27] [28] Posts also look to highlight a division between the 'true' servants of the Ivorian state, who would not resort to violence against their people, and the fifth-columnists in the police whose allegiances lie elsewhere. These posts focused on the violent suppression of opposition protests.

Notably, there appears to be some degree of counterspeech present in the data: a qualitative examination of some of the most widely shared videos find commentary calling for an end to the stigmatisation of Burkinabes and chastising the videos' authors for stirring up tension. A

[26] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=222895632388238&ref=watch_permalink
[27] https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=152595543208416&set=gm.1491540991034035&type=3
[28] https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=133943518405056&set=gm.755727431661688&type=3

post calling for an end to xenophobia towards Burkinabes on social media specifically was shared by 11 percent of pages in the dataset.[29] Moreover, there are frequent calls for unity and a rejection of intercommunity violence, suggesting the media ecosystem monitored here is a contested space. Unfortunately, measuring levels of support or counterspeech 'below the line' is not computationally feasible given the limitations of Facebook's API.

An activist with over 185k followers going by the name @donaldempe who also calls himself "Emperator L HOMME De Demain" has shared general posts encouraging Ivorian youth to protest against Ouattara alongside conspiratorial content.[30] Examples of content amplified by @donaldempe including a post by another influencer and self-described 'investigator' Chris Yapi, referencing a secret meeting between the UN and Ivorian soldiers as well as a list of Ouattara supporters which will allegedly be targeted by US sanctions.[31] The unverified claims aim at proving the Ouattara government is on the verge of collapse.

[29] https://www.facebook.com/groups/518585732317272/permalink/749185939257249/
[30] https://www.facebook.com/donaldempe/
[31] https://twitter.com/chrisyapi4/status/1314486654753746945?lang=en

# Conclusions

The trends identified in this case study show both continuity and variation when compared with Case Study 1. Whilst COVID-19 was a key theme for disinformation during the period covered by Case Study 1, this topic has been much more marginal in the online discussion over this period of study. Discussion has focused on Ouattara's decision to seek a third term after the death of his Prime Minister, a move which has prompted nation-wide demonstrations and fuelled accusations that Ouattara's government is becoming dictatorial. Central to these claims and accusations are the various influencers and cyberactivists identified as driving the conversation online.

While the decision by Ouattara to run again can be the object of legitimate criticism and scrutiny, we have also identified a number of narratives accusing the government of killing opponents and planning acts of violence and fraud. Conversely, pro-Ouattara activists and groups have spread unverified claims that various political opposition figures are inciting violence.

Mutual accusations of violence between pro and anti-Ouattara activists illustrate how volatile the political climate in the country is, and this volatility is being mirrored online. Beliefs that the other side is preparing acts of violence are used to call for preventive violence and to single out individuals believed to be affiliated with a certain party. As identified in case study one, a conspiratorial undertone runs through much of the most oppositional political discourse.

This conspiratorial undertone is further seen in the vocal distrust towards state institutions and security forces, both accused of enabling Ouattara in his attempt at organising a coup against Côte d'Ivoire democracy. The Conseil Constitutionnel is accused of being an enabler in the coup and the police are depicted as complicit in state-backed violence and repression. Against this backdrop, a number of disinformation narratives continue to be shared widely, including unverified rumors targeting women in politics. The motivations of these narratives are sometimes unknown or difficult to establish. In the case of gender-based disinformation, the effect is to discourage women from participating in politics, regardless of the particular motivation of those who are pushing the narrative.