

## Political Risk Update: August 12, 2020

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### Ivory Coast: President's new decision to seek a third term raises risk of violence

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**Event:** On August 6, President Alassane Ouattara announced that he had reversed his earlier decision to step down from the presidency after two terms and would instead seek re-election in October. He spoke of his "civic duty" to continue because of the void left by the recent death of Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, who was the original presidential candidate for the president's party.

**Outlook:** Opposition parties have denounced the President's decision to run for a third term, claiming that the country's two-term limit makes this illegal. Ouattara's supporters say that the adoption of a new constitution in 2016 allows him to run again.

#### Analysis

Ouattara's announcement came a week after Defence Minister Hamed Bakayoko was appointed as prime minister. Seen as a potential replacement for Gon Coulibaly in the role of presidential candidate, Bakayoko was among those who urged Ouattara to run again. Ouattara's decision will increase concerns about weakening term-limit adherence

regionally. It will also increase the risk of poll-related violence while encouraging a relatively weak opposition to take alliance-building efforts more seriously. Despite the controversies, Ouattara will be favourite to win the polls because of the benefits of incumbency.

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## **Belarus: President is betting that greater repression will keep him in power**

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**Event:** Protests broke out in Minsk and other cities on August 9 after official exit polls from the presidential election claimed overwhelming victory for incumbent Alexander Lukashenka.

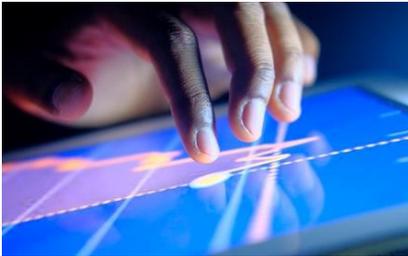
**Outlook:** Lukashenka will calculate that, as in past elections, he can rig the results and deploy riot police to crush protests. However, this time the factor of generational change means dissent will be harder to suppress. Poor governance and Lukashenka's failure to tackle COVID-19 have turned more of the population, and crucially more of the elite, against him.

### **Analysis**

Official figures show Lukashenka to have been re-elected with an unassailable, if implausible, 80% of the vote. Less than 10% was given to his main challenger, Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who drew unprecedented crowds at campaign rallies before the authorities banned them. However, unofficial polls suggest that Tsikhanouskaya won easily. After the result was announced, riot police attacked and arrested unarmed demonstrators as thousands occupied the streets late into the night. Despite the apparent landslide victory, Lukashenka is less secure than he appears. Crucially, he no longer enjoys unconditional support from Moscow, which will exact a high price in terms of forced political integration for propping him up economically. Resorting to greater repression will result in further ostracization by Washington and Brussels. For his part, Ali has promised

to renegotiate the contract with ExxonMobil to ensure more favourable terms for the country.

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## Ethiopia: Statehood demands in the south are becoming more destabilising

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**Event:** At least 18 people were injured amid protests on August 9 in Sodo, the capital city of the Wolayta Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR), after federal police arrested 26 people, including members of the committee established to pursue Wolayta's demands for federal statehood.

**Outlook:** The securitised response to Wolayta's struggle is more likely to inflame tensions than contain them, including in other SNNPR entities that also seek statehood. It will also encourage displays of support for southern struggles for statehood among other national opposition forces, further politicising the issue and making a resolution more complex.

### Analysis

Tensions have been rising in Wolayta since nearby Sidama became Ethiopia's tenth federal state in June following its successful campaign for statehood. Wolayta officials, too, have demanded a referendum on statehood for their zone but have so far been ignored by federal and regional authorities, who are reportedly considering a broader solution to accommodate a raft of new demands for statehood in the multi-ethnic SNNPR.

SNNPR officials accuse those arrested in recent days of planning to instigate violence and dismantle the region's political order.

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## Sri Lanka: Election outcome emboldens Rajapaksa regime

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**Event:** Results declared on August 7 from the legislative elections (held two days earlier) showed that the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), the party of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, won 145 out of 225 seats. The opposition United National Party (UNP) won just one seat, compared to 106 in 2015.

**Outlook:** With a two-thirds majority in parliament, the Rajapaksas will be emboldened to press ahead with their policy agenda. They will start with their planned reform of the constitution. While their hold on power tightens, the UNP faces an existential crisis in the wake of its crushing defeat.

### Analysis

The main opposition challenge in the new parliament will come from the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), which won 54 seats. The SJB was conceived as a UNP-led alliance but struggled to attract UNP members after its formation earlier this year. As some of the SLPP's alliance partners won a handful of seats, the Rajapaksa administration will have the support of a two-thirds parliamentary majority, giving them the ability to make constitutional changes. In particular, the Rajapaksas want to repeal the 19th amendment to the constitution, which weakened the powers of the presidency and strengthened those of the prime minister. They argue that the amendment has made it harder to ensure stable government and want greater executive power for the president.

## Iran: Tehran faces a greater US effort to achieve regime change

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**Event:** US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced on August 6 that Iran Special Envoy Brian Hook had resigned, to be replaced by Elliott Abrams. The change sends a message because Abrams will combine his Iran role with his similar portfolio on Venezuela, where Washington's regime-change agenda is explicit.

**Outlook:** Hook's replacement by Abrams intensifies the shift to an increasingly hard line US policy on Iran in the remainder of this presidential term, one that tends to be more towards regime change. While the Tehran establishment's resilience means that such a change is not imminent, the harder line from Washington will further empower conservative forces in Tehran.

### Analysis

Hook spearheaded the US policy of increasing 'maximum economic pressure' by tightening sanctions to make the Tehran regime renegotiate the 2015 multilateral Iran nuclear deal. Even though it left the agreement in 2017, Washington is now threatening to force the re-imposition of UN sanctions under its terms, unless the UN Security Council extends its weapons embargo on Iran, which is currently due to expire in October. A new US draft resolution apparently takes little account of concerns over the previous version expressed by others, including European partners. Given the lack of US cooperation with other Security Council members, the arms ban issue may simply be a stalking-horse to end the 2015 nuclear deal altogether.

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