



Freedom in the World - Ghana (2011)

Capital: Accra

Population:
23,837,000

Political Rights Score: 1 *

Civil Liberties Score: 2 *

Status: Free

Overview

While Ghana enjoyed relative political stability in 2010, hostilities increased between the ruling party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and its main opposition, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), particularly as President John Atta Mills continued corruption investigations of former NPP politicians. Tensions within the NDC, generated in large part by former president John Rawlings' criticisms of Atta Mills, also grew.

Ghana achieved independence from British rule in 1957. After the 1966 ouster of its independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah, the country was rocked for 15 years by a series of military coups and experienced successive military and civilian governments.

In 1979, air force officer Jerry Rawlings led a coup against the ruling military junta. His administration proved to be brutally repressive, banning political parties and quelling all dissent. While he agreed under economic and political pressure to hold multiparty elections in the late 1980s, the elections were considered neither free nor fair, and Rawlings and his National Democratic Congress (NDC) party remained in power. The 1996 elections were generally respected at home and abroad, but Rawlings and the NDC again retained their positions.

In 2000, free and fair presidential and parliamentary polls led to a peaceful transfer of power from Rawlings—who was forced to step down due to term limits—and the NDC to opposition leader John Kufuor and his New Patriotic Party (NPP). Kufuor secured 57 percent of the vote, while NDC candidate John Atta Mills captured 43 percent. Kufuor was reelected in 2004, defeating Atta Mills for a second time as the NDC alleged irregularities. The NPP won 128 seats in concurrent legislative elections, while the NDC took 94. Although there were reports of sporadic violence and a few incidents of intimidation and other irregularities, domestic and international observers judged the elections to be generally free and fair.

In advance of the December 2008 presidential election, the NPP faced internal divisions as over 20 candidates vied for the party's nomination. Ultimately, former foreign minister Nana Akufo-Addo was chosen over Kufuor's preferred candidate, Alan Kyerematen. Akufo-Addo and many of his supporters belonged to the Akyem tribe while Kufuor and Kyerematen were Ashanti, illustrating how ethnic rifts often complicated political ones. Meanwhile, the NDC chose Atta Mills as its candidate for the third time.

While problems with voter registration and fighting between NDC and NPP supporters were reported before and during the vote, the election was ultimately viewed as a success by domestic and international observers. The January 2009 inauguration of Atta Mills, who won the runoff with just 50.23 percent of the vote, marked the second peaceful, democratic transfer of power in Ghana. The NDC also won concurrent parliamentary elections, taking 114 seats while the NPP secured 107.

During his first two years in office, Atta Mills has faced the difficult task of attempting to fulfill at least some of his campaign pledges while also steering Ghana through the global economic crisis. Rawlings has increasingly and outspokenly criticized Atta Mills over a number of public policy decisions. Some NDC supporters, backed by Rawlings, have complained about the new president's inability to make good on his promises or "support those who supported him"—a reference to the patronage networks underlying Ghanaian politics. In August 2010, the NPP selected Akufo-Addo as its presidential candidate for the 2012 presidential election, setting the stage for another race between Akufo-Addo and Atta Mills, assuming the latter runs again. Meanwhile, tensions between Atta Mills and Rawlings continued to grow, and the Real Democratic Patriots Party (RDPP), a splinter group of the NDC claiming loyalty to Rawlings, formed in September.

While Ghana has been working to move away from donor dependency, Atta Mills' government has been forced to make exceptions to counter the economic crisis. In 2009, it was awarded \$1.2 billion in interest-free loans over three years from the World Bank and \$602.6 million from the International Monetary Fund to help tackle "macroeconomic instability." During Atta Mills's visit to Beijing in October 2010, Ghana and China signed agreements totaling \$15 billion in support of infrastructure projects in the country. Ghana started producing oil for the first time in December, and experts predicted that oil exports would bring serious economic growth for the country in 2011.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Ghana is an electoral democracy. The December 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections were considered fair and competitive. The president and vice president are directly elected on the same ticket for up to two four-year terms. Members of the unicameral, 230-seat Parliament are also elected for four-year terms. The political system is dominated by two rival parties, the NPP and the NDC.

One of Atta Mills's campaign promises was to fight corruption and improve governance. The NDC administration has used the Bureau of National Investigation to examine corruption allegations against a number of former NPP officials, including John Kufuor's health, information, and foreign ministers. While many Ghanaians have supported these anticorruption efforts, NPP officials allege that the cases are politicized. In the summer of 2010, NPP leaders accused the government of corruption when documents regarding a \$10 billion housing deal with the company STX Korea were not made available for review by Parliament. Nonetheless, the government signed an agreement to commence construction in December. Although approved by the cabinet in 2009, the government has yet to pass the Right to Information Bill, which could pave the way for greater government transparency. Ghana was ranked 62 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Numerous private radio stations operate, and many independent newspapers and magazines are published in Accra. However, the government occasionally restricts press freedom in practice through harassment, arrests, and criminal charges. In February 2010, NPP activist Nana Darkwa Baafi was detained on charges of "publishing false news with intent to cause fear or harm to the public or to disturb the public peace." His arrest prompted the NPP to boycott parliamentary proceedings for two days. Baafi had alleged during a radio interview that former president John Rawlings had set fire to his own government-sponsored residence in an effort to acquire new housing. During Baafi's hearing in March, NPP and NDC supporters clashed at the Accra courthouse, leaving two injured. The case was ultimately dropped in October. In July, criminal charges were brought against the acting news editor of Joy FM, Ato Kwamena Dadzie, for his coverage of the scandal surrounding the STX Korea housing deal. In January, the government began the Phone Chip Registration Project, which requires that all prepaid mobile phone users register with the government before June 30, 2011 or face disconnection. The measure is aimed at curbing crime by mobile phone users, but some civil society organizations argue that such an initiative could infringe upon privacy rights, lead to abuse of users' personal data, and encourage improper monitoring of telephone conversations. Internet access is unrestricted.

Religious freedom is protected by law and largely respected in practice. While relations between Ghana's Christian majority and Muslim minority are generally peaceful, Muslims often report feeling politically and socially excluded, and there are few Muslims at the top levels of government. Both domestic and international human rights observers have reported a high incidence of exorcism-related physical abuse at Pentecostal prayer camps. Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and upheld in practice.

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed, and permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. Multiple demonstrations took place in 2010 over unpaid wages, including those led by university teachers, nurses and midwives, and prison officers. Additionally, citizens protested against increases in electricity and water tariffs in June. Civil society organizations have noted that NDC "foot soldiers"—activists that assist NDC campaigns by distributing literature and generating crowds, among other activities—have become increasingly disgruntled with the government and have reportedly harassed and attacked state officials, with few consequences. Nongovernmental organizations were generally able to operate freely.

Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, which conform to International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, workers have the right to form and join trade unions. However, the government forbids industrial action in a number of essential industries, including fuel distribution, public transportation, and the prison system.

Ghanaian courts have acted with increased autonomy under the 1992 constitution, but corruption remains a problem. Scarce resources compromise the judicial process, and poorly paid judges are tempted by bribes. The Accra Fast Track High Court is specifically tasked with hearing corruption cases involving former government officials, but many observers raised doubts about its impartiality and respect for due process under the Kufuor administration. In August 2010, the chairman of the NDC urged the chief justice to "purge" the judiciary of corruption or face government intervention, leading critics to condemn the NDC for attempting to infringe upon the judiciary's independence.

Prisons suffer from overcrowding and often life-threatening conditions. In an attempt to reduce overcrowding, a government initiative introduced in 2008 has led to the release of some prisoners who had been on prolonged remand without trial. A 2009 presidential pardon of 1,021 prisoners eased some of the strain on prison infrastructure.

Communal and ethnic violence occasionally flares in Ghana. In March 2010, tensions rose in the Brong Ahafo region between the Tuobodom and Techiman groups, resulting in three deaths. Some argued that the regional police failed to prevent the escalation of violence, though a government investigation into the incident was ongoing at year's end. Other isolated cases of communal and ethnic violence occurred throughout the year, including several ritual killings and murders of suspected thieves.

Despite equal rights under the law, women suffer societal discrimination, especially in rural areas where opportunities for education and wage employment are limited. Notwithstanding legal protections, few victims report cases of domestic violence because of persistent social stigmas. However, women's enrollment in universities is increasing, and there are a number of high-ranking women in the current government. In 2009, for the first time, there was a female speaker of Parliament, police inspector general, and attorney general.

The country serves as a source, transit point, and destination for the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation. In 2009, following undercover work conducted by a journalist working for the *New Crusading Guide* newspaper, three Chinese nationals were sentenced to a combined 36 years of hard labor for trafficking fellow Chinese for prostitution in Ghana.

**Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*