



World Directory of Minorities

Africa MRG Directory → Ghana → Ghana Overview

Print Page

Close Window

Ghana Overview

- [Environment](#)
- [Peoples](#)
- [History](#)
- [Governance](#)
- [Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples](#)

Environment

Ghana is located on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa and is bordered by three Francophone nations: [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Burkina Faso](#) and [Togo](#). The tropical south gives way to a drier, hotter north. Ghana has large gold mines and is one of the world's leading exporters of cocoa.

Peoples

Main languages: English (official), Akan, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani, Hausa and other indigenous languages

Main religions: Christianity, indigenous beliefs, Islam

Minority groups include Ewe 2.3 million (10%) and [Konkomba](#) 500,000 (2.2%).

[Note: The figures for Ewe and Konkomba come from Ethnologue, 2003; percentages are based on the 2006 CIA World Factbook population estimate of 22.4 million, and percentages for religion (below) are CIA figures.]

Ghana's population is composed of over fifty distinct groups. While most are from Akan, Ewe, Ga and Mole-Dagbani backgrounds, Ghana has attracted migrants from all of West Africa such that almost every West African group is present in its heterogeneous population including Fula, Hausa, Igbo, Mande, Mossi, Songhai and Yoruba. About 21 per cent of the population maintains traditional animistic beliefs. Christianity is the religion of 63 per cent of the population. About 16 per cent of Ghanaians are Muslim.

Eweland is an area between the Mono river in Togo and the Voltat Lake in Ghana. Ewes and related peoples are also found in Benin and southern Togo.. Periodic efforts have been made by the Ewe towards self-determination, although the issue has died out since the late 1970s. They speak various dialects of Ewe which belong to the Kwa family of Niger-Congo languages. Traditionally their government was a configuration of many small chiefdoms governed by a council of chiefs and was less complex and powerful than that of the Fon of Benin to whom the Ewe are related. Traditionally, Ewe are subsistence farmers, craftspeople and traders, although in today's Ghana they practice a much broader range of professions. Fishing in coastal waters is important. Descent is patrilineal, and the largest kinship unit is the patrilineage.

[^top](#)

History

Between 1500 and 1870 an estimated 10 million slaves left Africa, about 19 per cent of them from the Gold Coast. The British, who from 1660 were the chief competitors of the Dutch, greatly increased their involvement in the Gold Coast between 1850 and 1874, by which time they had practically broken the authority of the traditional African rulers.

From 1885 to 1914 Eweland was divided between British and German rule. During World War One, most Ewe were under British rule in the form of a League of Nations mandate. In the aftermath, the eastern region of Eweland became part of French-ruled Togo, while the rest was administered by Britain either as a mandate or as part of the Gold Coast. In a 1956 plebiscite undertaken in the British mandate territory, the majority cast in favour of joining Ghana.

Created from the British Gold Coast Colony, Asante, the Northern Territories Protectorate and the UN Trust Territory of Togo, Ghana became independent within the Commonwealth in 1957 and pan-Africanist independence leader Kwame Nkrumah became prime minister. Three years later Ghana became a republic, with Nkrumah its president. The charismatic Nkrumah was incapable of realizing his grand visions for Ghana and Africa, as his regime born in hope descended into despotism and pursuit of Marxist economic policies that proved catastrophic. However, perhaps due to Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, even as Ghana declined under his rule and his popularity plummeted, he refused to play the ethnic card for political gain.

In 1966 the military seized control of Ghana while Nkrumah was out of the country. The coup ushered in an era of long periods of military rule interspersed with short-lived civilian governments. Some among the Ashanti, part of the majority Akan cluster, wanted to carve up the country into a federation which would enable them to regain control over cocoa, timber and gold from the coastal Ewe, Fanti and Ga politicians who controlled much of the economy. Ashanti gained privilege with the rise of Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, who seized power in a 1972 coup, sparking secessionist sentiment from Ewe people. Economic mismanagement and ethnic grievances led to protests and eventual arrest by his own chief of staff, Fred Akuffo, in 1978. Akuffo re-opened Ghana to multi-party politics for the first time since the 1972 coup that overthrew Kofi Busia. The experiment was short-lived, as rampant corruption within the military's senior ranks kept Ghanaian politics at a boil.

Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, who is half Ewe and allegedly half-Scottish, and a group of junior and non-commissioned officers seized power in a bloody 1979 coup, and executed both Acheampong and Akuffo, along with several senior officers they accused of corruption. The purge extended to other allegedly corrupt officials who through dubious proceedings were tried, convicted, and sentenced to long prison terms. During its brief tenure, the junta disproportionately brought Ewe into positions of power. Rawlings and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council instituted a western-style constitution and allowed planned elections to proceed. The junta handed power to elected president Hilla Limann in September 1979. Limann belonged to Nkrumah's successor party and, like Nkrumah, was an adherent of pan-Africanism; a northerner, he had support among both Ashanti and Ewe. Rawlings grew impatient with Limann's lackluster governance and inability to turn around the economy

In 1981 he seized power again as head of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). Rawlings banned political parties, crushed dissent, and pursued a radically socialist economic model. Divisions surfaced within the military over the direction of the revolution, and Rawlings had to fend off coup attempts in 1982 and 1983. As economic deterioration continued, Rawlings changed course in 1983, abolishing subsidies and price controls, devaluing the currency, then embracing structural adjustment programmes put forward by the international financial institutions. Ghanaians grew impatient for a return to multi-party civilian rule—a sentiment that was particularly strong among peoples including the Ashanti and Mossi-Dagomba who were largely excluded from power under the Rawlings regime. By the early 1990s international pressure for political liberalization had also grown. In response, Rawlings accepted a new constitution in April 1992 that returned Ghana to a

multi-party system, but the opposition alleged that he manipulated the resulting presidential elections to remain in power, although this is doubtful. The vote result showed a strong polarization of the electorate along north-south, largely Ashanti-Ewe lines.

Displacement of Ewe who straddle the Togo-Ghana border in 1991-92 as the result of conflict with the Kabre-dominated Eyadema in Togo led to an influx of refugees in Ghana. At the same time large numbers of refugees from the Liberian civil war were also entering Ghana.

During the 1990s, Ghana experienced an upsurge of regionalist, ethnic and other exclusivist sentiments which accompanied a restructuring of local government into 110 district assemblies. These became the focus of power struggles that were sometimes ethnic. Towns competed to be the headquarters of these new assemblies and Rawlings' PNDC upgraded a significant number of chiefdoms in the new districts to the status of paramount chiefs. Chieftaincy power was traditionally rooted in ethnic particularity and is strongly patriarchal. The government interfered in chieftaincy matters in a rapprochement with those groups and institutions whose power it had previously threatened. Chiefs now enjoyed an influence unrivalled since the colonial era. However some groups, such as the Konkomba, had been traditionally excluded from the paramount chieftaincy system and land ownership, and their petitioning for the elevation of some of their chiefs to paramount status was seen by other ethnic groups as a back-door move towards land ownership. Fighting erupted between areas that have chieftaincy and those that do not, claiming the lives of an estimated 2,000 people, displacing 200,000, and destroying over 400 villages.

Rawlings won re-election in 1996, and despite flaws, international observers largely regarded the vote as free and fair.

[^top](#)

Governance

Rawlings held to a constitutionally mandated term limit, and the 2000 election was fought between his vice-president, John Atta Mills and opposition leader John Kufuor, an Ashanti. Despite scattered reports of irregularities, international observers regarded the campaign and vote as exemplary, and in 2001 one democratically elected Ghanaian handed power to another, John Kufuor. Kufuor set about easing restrictions on the media, decreasing political interference in the judiciary, and further liberalizing the economy.

Despite fears that the end of the Rawlings era and a rapid halt to Ewe favouritism could lead to ethnic unrest, Kufuor has deflated the Ashanti-Ewe rivalry. However, there have been increasing allegations of nepotism. A National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) working from 2002-2004 and modelled after South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, delved into human rights abuses since independence, with a focus on the brutal early years of Rawlings' military regime.

In December 2004, Kufuor won a second term as president, again defeating John Atta-Mills. Despite opposition allegations of irregularities, international observers held the vote to have been free and fair.

[^top](#)

Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

In October 2006 the Ghanaian government began making reparation payments to around 2,000 victims of past human rights abuses, in accordance with the NRC's recommendations. People who suffered abuses including torture, arbitrary detention, and confiscation of property—mostly during the rule of Jerry Rawlings—were slated to receive payments between \$217 and \$3,300.

Despite the de-politicization of ethnicity in Accra, the colonial legacy of chieftaincy retains the potential to cause conflict, especially in the north among the Konkomba. In January 2006 fierce fighting erupted between rivals for the vacant Nanumba chieftaincy, leading to scores of woundings by gunshot and machete. Land prices have risen in recent years, raising the stakes for Konkomba and other northern communities already at loggerheads over control of territory.

[^top](#)

powered by [the webbler](#)