



Freedom in the World 2016 - Ghana

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 83

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Political Rights: 1

Civil Liberties: 2

Quick Facts

Capital: Accra

Population: 27,672,800

GDP/capita: \$1,442.80

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

Net Freedom Status: N/A

OVERVIEW

Ghana's judiciary was thrown into crisis in October following the release of a documentary that implicated 34 judges and scores of officials in accepting bribes over the past two years.

Ghana's main political parties continued preparations for the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections, with both the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its main rival, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), holding primaries during the year. Guided by recommendations from the Supreme Court for reforming the administration of elections, the Electoral Commission (EC) introduced a series of changes and continued consulting with political parties on revising the voter register.

Ghana's economy continued to weaken, facing high inflation, currency depreciation, credit-rating downgrades, and slower-than-expected economic growth. In April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year \$918 million program to boost economic growth, employment, and investor confidence.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 37 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Ghana has experienced competitive multiparty elections since 1992. The president and vice president are directly elected on the same ticket for up to two four-year terms. Members of the unicameral, 275-seat Parliament are also elected for four-year terms.

In 2012, John Mahama of the NDC was elected president with 50.7 percent of the vote, while Akufo-Addo of the NPP took 47.7 percent. In concurrent parliamentary elections, the NDC captured 148 seats and the NPP took 123; a small party won the remaining seat. Limited technical problems, including the breakdown of new biometric machines used to register and identify voters, led to the extension of voting by a day at many polling places. Although international and domestic observers praised the elections as free, fair, and peaceful, the NPP disputed the results, questioned the neutrality of the EC, and filed a legal suit before the Supreme Court. In 2013, the Supreme Court dismissed the NPP's claim and ruled that Mahama had been fairly elected. For many domestic and international observers, the peaceful resolution of the legal challenge underscored the consolidation of democracy and respect for rule of law in Ghana.

In June 2015, President Mahama appointed Charlotte Osei as the new chair of the EC, following the retirement of the previous chair. Opposition parties and domestic stakeholders, while approving of Osei's character and qualifications, criticized President Mahama's unwillingness to consult with lawmakers and party officials in the appointment process.

In October, the EC held a public forum in which the NPP, along with domestic rights groups including the Christian Council of Ghana, demanded a complete overhaul of the voter registry. Following the recommendations of an independent panel, in December the EC decided against overhauling the registry.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Ghana's multiparty system provides ample opportunity for opposition parties to participate meaningfully in the political process. The NPP and the NDC dominate the political system. The country has experienced two peaceful, democratic transfers of power between presidents from the NPP and NDC, in 2000 and in 2008. The legal framework provides for equal participation in political life for the country's various cultural, religious, and ethnic minorities.

In May 2015, Adams Mahama, NPP chairperson of the Upper East Region, was attacked and killed. Police arrested and charged three suspects in the murder, including George Afoko, brother of NPP chairman Paul Afoko. Paul Afoko was indefinitely suspended from the NPP, exacerbating internal divisions within the party. In September, members of the NPP and the Let My Vote Count Alliance (LMVCA) were allegedly beaten and arrested during a demonstration in which they called for an overhaul of the voter register. NPP leader Nana Akufo-Addo and leaders of the LMCVA condemned the attacks and called for an independent investigation, which President Mahama instructed the police to conduct.

The NPP is traditionally supported by the Akan people and the NDC by the Ewe and other northern groups. Although the lines have been blurred over the years, ethnicity continues to play a role in voting patterns and representation.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Political corruption continues to be a problem, despite active media coverage, the existence of robust legal and institutional frameworks to combat it, and the government's willingness to investigate major scandals. The media, opposition parties, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continue to criticize the government for its inability to prevent political corruption and prosecute public officials suspected of malfeasance.

In September 2015, President Mahama fired Laurretta Lamptey, chair of the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) – Ghana's leading anticorruption body – for allegedly mismanaging commission funds linked to the renovation of her official residence. In 2014, officials were accused of bloating the public payroll with ghost workers. The European Union (EU), which had made resolution of the scandal a precondition for resumption of EU aid payments, restarted those payments in May 2015 after the government made a plan to address irregularities. A court case involving parliamentarian Abuga Pele, who was charged in 2014 for allegedly granting interest-free loans worth \$100 million to private companies without parliamentary approval, continued in 2015.

The government continued to strengthen the institutional and legal anticorruption framework in 2015. Following the passage of the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP) in 2014, which aims to improve the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of corruption by strengthening a number of state agencies, the CHRAJ trained 35 ethics and integrity compliance officers. A UN report released in February 2015, however, highlighted the government's inability to implement its anticorruption policies and effectively prosecute offenders. A report by the Institute of Economic Affairs, while commending Ghana's oil and gas industry for making progress in revenue and expenditure transparency, recommended the passage of a Right to Information Bill and the disbursement of more resources to parliamentary oversight bodies. In October, Parliament indicated that it would begin debate on a Right to Information bill, though the bill had not been passed by year's end.

Civil Liberties: 46 / 60 (-1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. Ghana has a diverse and vibrant media landscape that includes state and privately owned television and radio stations, and several independent newspapers and magazines. The internet has generally been unrestricted. However, government agencies occasionally restrict press freedom through harassment and arrests of journalists, especially those reporting on politically sensitive issues. In September 2015, journalists and media organizations condemned presidential staffer Stan Dogbe, who allegedly attacked Ghana Broadcasting Corporation journalist Yahayah Kwamoah and damaged his recording device. In May, supporters of the NPP in the Upper East Region were suspected of attacking Staff FM radio journalist Edward Adeti during a party meeting. The NPP apologized for the incident and committed to hold the perpetrators accountable. Media groups have criticized police for failing to protect journalists from TV-Africa who were attacked while covering demonstrations in the slum known as Sodom and Gomorrah in Accra.

Although criminal libel and sedition laws were repealed in 2001, powerful figures attempt to use the legal system to punish dissent. In September, Justice Paul Dery, one 34 judges implicated in a high-profile bribery scandal, sued four journalists and the Media Foundation for West Africa for promoting a video that documents judges and judicial staff accepting bribes. The suit had been withdrawn by the end of September.

Religious freedom is constitutionally and legally protected, and the government largely respects it in practice. However, Muslim families have complained that the compulsory Christian prayer sessions and church services that are widespread in Ghana's public schools seek to promote Christianity and violate their children's religious freedom.

Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and upheld in practice, and private discussion is both free and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. Public discontent with the government's management of the economy and inability to tackle political corruption prompted numerous public protests, demonstrations, and strikes throughout 2015.

NGOs are generally able to operate freely, and they play an important role in ensuring government accountability and transparency.

Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, workers have the right to form and join trade unions. However, the government forbids or restricts labor action in a number of industries, including fuel distribution, public transportation, and the prison system. In August 2015, Ghanaian doctors held a three-week strike over working conditions and a pay package that they claimed severely hampered outpatient and emergency services at public institutions.

F. Rule of Law: 11 / 16 (-1)

Judicial independence in Ghana is constitutionally and legally enshrined. While the judiciary has demonstrated greater levels of impartiality in recent years, corruption remains a challenge. In September, Ghana's judiciary was thrown into crisis following the release of a documentary that allegedly showed 34 judges and scores of judicial officials accepting bribes in exchange for favorable judgments over the past two years. Chief Justice Georgina Wood and the Judicial Council launched investigations into the allegations and fired 20 lower court judges in December.

Police in Ghana have a history of using excessive force, making arbitrary arrests, detaining suspects for extended periods, and taking bribes. In March, high-ranking police officials, including a commissioner, were arrested and charged for their involvement in a scandal in which approximately 200 potential police recruits were given fake acceptance letters and charged around \$500 to begin training at the police academy.

Ghana's prisons are overcrowded, and conditions are often life-threatening, though the prison service has attempted to reduce congestion and improve the treatment of inmates. In June, the prison service launched an effort to seek private funding for the revitalization of Ghana's prison systems. Ghana continues to cooperate with the UN Refugee Agency to protect the rights of the 21,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

Communal and ethnic violence occasionally flare in Ghana. In July, four people were killed and another injured in violence related to a chieftaincy dispute in Bimbilla in the Northern Region.

Ghanaian law prohibits "sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner." There were no reports of adults being prosecuted for same-sex sexual activity in 2015. Nevertheless, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continue to face societal discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the constitution and respected by the government, and Ghanaians are free to choose their place of residence. However, poorly developed road networks and banditry make travel outside the capital and touristic areas difficult. Police have been known to set up illegal checkpoints to demand bribes from travelers. Bribery is also rife in the education sector. According to the 2015 Global Corruption Barometer's report, more than 25 percent of Ghanaians with contact with public schools during the past year admitted to paying a bribe to obtain educational services.

Weak rule of law, corruption, and an underregulated property rights system remain significant impediments to economic freedom and business confidence in Ghana. Bribery is a common practice to start a business and register property.

Despite equal rights under the law, women suffer societal discrimination, especially in rural areas, where opportunities for education and wage employment are limited. However, women's enrollment in universities is increasing, and a number of women hold high-ranking positions in the government: six members of the current cabinet are women, and 30 of the 275 parliamentary seats went to female legislators in the 2012 elections.

Domestic violence and rape are serious problems, and the practice of female genital mutilation continues in the north. The government has worked to combat gender-based violence by expanding the police's domestic violence and victim support unit, creating gender-based violence courts, establishing domestic violence shelters, and training police and service providers likely to encounter domestic violence situations.

Ghana serves as a source, transit point, and destination for the trafficking of women and children for labor and sexual exploitation. Children in Ghana, especially in the region surrounding Lake Volta, are vulnerable to exploitation in the agricultural and fishing industries. While the government has taken some steps in recent years, it still fails to implement appropriate antitrafficking legislation and effectively fund antitrafficking agencies.

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