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Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2021 - Ghana

FREE

82

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 35 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 47 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

82 / 100 Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Since 1992, Ghana has held competitive multiparty elections and undergone peaceful transfers of power between the two main political parties. Although the country has a relatively strong record of upholding civil liberties, discrimination against women and LGBT+ people persists. There are some weaknesses in judicial independence and the rule of law, corruption presents challenges to government performance, and political violence is a growing concern.

Key Developments in 2020

- President Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won a second term in December, defeating predecessor John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in an effective rematch. While election observers considered the polls well-managed, Mahama called the results fraudulent and NDC supporters held protests; the immediate postelection period was marred by violence, with police reporting five deaths several days after the polls.
- The NPP and NDC ended the concurrent parliamentary elections with a tie, with each party winning 137 seats. An independent legislator agreed to support the NPP later that month, giving it a bare majority.
- In March, the government instituted COVID-19-related movement and gathering restrictions and promulgated an Imposition of Restrictions Act (IRA) that was criticized by the NDC and legal observers for its disproportionality. A lockdown was also instituted in the Accra and Kumasi areas, though they were relaxed in late April. At year's end, the World Health Organization reported a total of 54,771 COVID-19 cases and 335 deaths.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

The president, who serves as head of state and head of government, is directly elected for up to two four-year terms. President Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP won a second term in the December 2020 presidential election with 51.3 percent of the vote, while his predecessor, John Mahama (2012–17) of the NDC, took 47.3 percent. African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) electoral observers called the contest well-organized and generally peaceful, though EU monitors criticized a lack of campaign finance regulation and a misuse of state resources. However, Mahama rejected the results, alleging fraud, and issued a legal challenge that was pending at year's end.

The immediate postelection period was marred by violence, with the national police reporting at least five deaths in the days following the vote. NDC supporters held protests in parts of Ghana in December, notably marching on the Electoral Commission (EC) headquarters in Accra in the middle of the month.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

Members of the unicameral, 275-seat Parliament are elected directly in single-member constituencies to serve four-year terms.

The NPP, which held a majority in the previous parliament, and the NDC each won 137 seats in December 2020 elections held concurrently with the presidential contest. One seat was won by an independent who agreed to support the NPP, giving that party a bare de facto majority. Monitors lauded the elections’ overall conduct.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 4 / election management bodies?

Domestic and international observers consider the EC a capable manager of the electoral process. However, its composition has been the subject of political disagreement in the past; the 2018 appointment of Jean Mensah as its chairwoman was criticized by the NDC, which called her appointment partisan. Civil society largely lauded Mensah’s selection, however.

In 2019, the EC announced plans to compile a new voter register ahead of the December 2020 elections. During a six-week period between June and August, and for one day in October, the EC registered voters through an updated biometric system. While this drive was largely successful, a number of minors and foreign-born residents were reportedly able to register, and NPP and NDC supporters clashed at some registration sites. AU electoral observers ultimately lauded the registration process and the EC’s overall performance in a December statement.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these 3 / competing parties or groupings?

The constitution guarantees the right to form political parties, and this right is generally respected. However, civil society groups have expressed concern about the rising involvement of partisan vigilante groups in inter- and intraparty disputes.

Candidates, especially from smaller parties, were impeded in their ability to compete by an increase in registration fees. In September 2020, Mensah announced that presidential candidates were responsible for filing fees totaling 100,000 cedi (\$17,200), double the 2016 amount, while fees for parliamentary candidates stood at 10,000 cedi (\$1,730).

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through 4 / elections?

There have been multiple peaceful transfers of power between the NPP and NDC and parties in opposition have meaningful opportunities to increase their public support and win office. Mahama’s defeat in the 2016 presidential race marked the first time since the 1992 reintroduction of multiparty politics that an incumbent stood for reelection and lost.

While Ghanaian political contests are generally peaceful, candidates are sometimes victims of violence. In October 2020, NPP member of Parliament (MP) Ekow Quansah Hayford was shot and killed by several assailants in an apparent robbery, as he left the campaign trail. In mid-December, days after parliamentary elections were held, NDC MP Kwame Gakpe was attacked in his home and was subsequently hospitalized; the party alleged that NPP supporters attacked him.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political 3 / sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

Ghanaians are generally free from undue interference with their political choices by powerful groups that are not democratically accountable. However, voters and candidates are threatened by vigilantism and politically motivated violence despite the 2019 promulgation of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, which bans all political and other vigilante groups.

NPP and NDC supporters clashed at several voter registration sites in July 2020—despite an agreement between the two parties to refrain from such activity—resulting in one death. Then special development minister Mavis Hawa Koomson was publicly criticized for firing warning shots at a registration center in her constituency that month, and said she did so to protect herself.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 3 / relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

Ghanaian laws provide for equal participation in political life by the country’s various cultural, religious, and ethnic groups. Women formally enjoy political equality, but hold comparatively few leadership positions in practice. However, in July 2020, the NDC selected Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as its vice-presidential candidate, the first

time a woman was placed on a major party’s presidential ticket. Women won 40 parliamentary seats in the December elections, a slight increase over the 2016 results and the largest share since the reintroduction of multiparty politics.

The National House of Chiefs, Ghana’s highest body of customary authority, has been under pressure to include women as members.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4

Elected officials are generally free to set and implement government policy without improper influence from unelected entities. However, the president gained the ability to more easily enact states of emergency under the Imposition of Restrictions Act (IRA). The IRA, which was passed by Parliament and signed by Akufo-Addo in March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic became a global crisis, limited the ability of Parliament to easily revoke presidentially declared states of emergency. The IRA was criticized by the NDC and legal scholars, who warned that the legislation was disproportionate and gave the executive wide-ranging powers. The IRA expired in December, though the government vowed to renew it later that month.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Political corruption remains a problem despite active media coverage, fairly robust laws and institutions, and government antigraft initiatives. Legislation adopted in 2017 established the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) to investigate political corruption. President Akufo-Addo appointed former attorney general Martin Amidu, a NDC member, as special prosecutor in 2018.

Amidu resigned in November 2020, citing a lack of resources as one of his reasons. Amidu also claimed that Akufo-Addo sought to interfere in a report on the transfer of mineral royalties to publicly owned Agyapa Royalties. The OSP warned that the plan, which envisioned Accra selling shares in the firm, could lead to “bid rigging” or “illicit financial flows.” Akufo-Addo sent the proposed transaction back to Parliament for consideration that month, where it remained at year’s end. Amidu’s deputy, Jane Cynthia Naa Torshie Lamptey, became the acting special prosecutor in late November.

The administrations of former presidents John Atta Mills (2009–12) and Mahama were implicated in a bribery scheme in January 2020, when European aircraft maker Airbus admitted to bribing individuals in Ghana and several other countries between 2011 and 2015. President Akufo-Addo referred the matter to the OSP in February; it named Mahama’s brother a person of interest in March and reported that Mahama himself was directly implicated in July. However, Amidu elected not to open an investigation against Mahama before resigning as special prosecutor. The probe remained active at year’s end.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4

The government operates with relative transparency, though there are weaknesses in the legal framework. In 2019, Akufo-Addo signed the Right to Information Act, which grants citizens the right to seek, access, and receive information from public as well as some private institutions. The law came into effect in January 2020.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4

Freedom of the press 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 as well as a number of independent newspapers and magazines. Online news media operate without government restrictions. Government agencies occasionally limit press freedom by harassing and arresting journalists, especially those reporting on politically sensitive issues.

Journalists were also impeded in their work under the cover of COVID-19-related restrictions. In April 2020, Zuria FM manager Yussif Abdul-Ganiyu was physically attacked by a soldier while reporting on the lockdown in the city of Kumasi and was later detained before he was ultimately released without charge. Several days later, soldiers enforcing a lockdown assaulted TV Africa journalist Samuel Adobah in Greater Accra as while he reported on a fire there. Journalists also faced detention, threats, and harassment while covering the December 2020 elections.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 3 / 4

Religious freedom is constitutionally and legally protected, and the government largely upholds these protections in practice. However, public schools feature mandatory religious education courses drawing on Christianity and Islam, and Muslim students have allegedly been required to participate in Christian prayer sessions and church services in some publicly funded Christian schools.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 4 / 4

Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and generally upheld in practice.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4

Private discussion is both free and vibrant. The government does not restrict individual expression on social media.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

The right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. However, President Akufo-Addo instituted COVID-19-related movement and gathering restrictions in March 2020. Assembly restrictions were relaxed, though not totally rescinded, at the end of May and again in late July.

Despite the pandemic and related restrictions, notable protests occurred during the year. In June 2020, some 60 people attended an Accra vigil held under the Black Lives Matter banner in response to the May killing of George Floyd in the United States. Attendees clashed with Accra police after they arrested the event’s organizer, and officers later fired into the air to disperse the gathering. NDC supporters who rejected the results of the December elections held protests in several parts of the country in the days after the polls. Later that month, Accra police secured a restraining order to prohibit further opposition protests in the capital.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations are generally able to operate freely and play an important role in ensuring government accountability and transparency.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, workers have the right to form and join trade unions. However, the government forbids or restricts organized labor action in a number of sectors, including fuel distribution and utilities, public transportation, and ports and harbor services.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 2 / 4

Judicial independence is constitutionally and legally enshrined. While the judiciary has demonstrated greater levels of impartiality in recent years, corruption and bribery continue to pose challenges.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 3 / 4

Constitutional protections for due process and defendants’ rights are mostly upheld. However, police have been known to accept bribes, make arbitrary arrests, and hold people without charge for longer than the legally permitted limit of 48 hours. The government is not obliged to provide the accused with legal counsel, and many people unable to afford lawyers are forced to represent themselves in court.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4

Prisons are overcrowded, and conditions can be life threatening, though the prison service has attempted to reduce congestion and improve the treatment of inmates in recent years.

Communal and ethnic violence is known to take place in parts of Ghana. Communal violence that began in 2018 between members of the Konkomba and Chokosi ethnic groups in North East Region escalated in 2019. In April 2020, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reported that 2,300 people had been internally displaced by that conflict, which began over a land dispute.

Islamic militants and other armed groups active in the Sahel have reportedly taken refuge in the northern reaches of Ghana in recent years.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 3 / 4

Despite equal rights under the law, women face societal discrimination, especially in rural areas, where their opportunities for education and employment are limited. However, women's enrollment in universities is increasing. People with disabilities and LGBT+ people also face societal discrimination. Same-sex sexual activity remains criminalized, encouraging police harassment and impunity for violence against LGBT+ people.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights**G1 0-4 pts****Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, 3 / employment, or education? 4**

Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the constitution and is generally respected by the government. However, poorly developed road networks and banditry can make travel outside the capital and tourist areas difficult. Police have been known to set up illegal checkpoints to demand bribes from travelers. Bribery is also rife in the education sector.

Movement restrictions were introduced in March 2020, as the government formulated a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns were introduced in the Accra and Kumasi metropolitan areas, though they were relaxed beginning in late April. Restrictions on domestic flights were lifted in early May.

G2 0-4 pts**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 3 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4**

Although the legal framework generally supports property ownership and private business activity, weaknesses in the rule of law, corruption, and an underregulated property rights system remain impediments. Bribery is a common practice when starting a business and registering property.

G3 0-4 pts**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 3 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4**

While personal social freedoms are upheld in many respects and among large segments of the population, domestic violence and rape are serious problems, and harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation and early or forced marriage persist in certain regions.

The government has worked to combat gender-based violence, including by expanding the police's domestic violence and victim support units and creating special courts for gender-based violence, though such services are reportedly underresourced.

G4 0-4 pts**Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4**

Most workers are employed in the informal sector, limiting the effectiveness of legal and regulatory safeguards for working conditions. The exploitation of children in the agricultural and mining sectors remains a problem. Similar abuses in the fishing industry have also been reported, especially in the region surrounding Lake Volta.

In the 2020 edition of its *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the US State Department reported that the Ghanaian government had bolstered its efforts to identify trafficking survivors and prosecute suspects. However, the State Department also noted that the government's efforts were underresourced, and that corruption affected its ultimate success.

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Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien <u>T (Telefon)</u> +43 1 589 00 583 <u>F (Fax)</u> +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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