



Freedom in the World - Ghana (2010)

Capital:
Accra

Population:
23,837,000

Political Rights Score: 1 *

Civil Liberties Score: 2 *

Status: Free

Overview

President John Atta Mills, who took office in January 2009, spent his first year in power working to fulfill campaign promises by investigating corruption, increasing government transparency, and improving living standards for the poor. However, he also had to contend with the effects of the global economic crisis, and it remained unclear whether his administration would prove effective.

Ghana achieved independence from British rule in 1957. After the 1966 ouster of its charismatic independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah, the country was rocked for 15 years by a series of military coups. Successive military and civilian governments vied with one another in both incompetence and dishonesty.

In 1979, air force officer Jerry Rawlings led a coup against the ruling military junta, and although he returned power to a civilian government after a purge of corrupt senior army officers, he seized power again in December 1981. Rawlings's new 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 won soundly with 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 Parliament, and the NDC took 94. Sporadic violence was reported, as were a few incidents of intimidation and other irregularities, but 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 division as over 20 candidates vied for the party's nomination. Ultimately, Nana Akufo-Addo, most recently the foreign minister, was chosen over Kufuor's preferred candidate, Alan Kyerematen. The fact that Akufo-Addo and many of his supporters belonged to the Akyem tribe while Kufuor and Kyerematen were Ashanti meant that ethnic rifts often complicated the political ones. Meanwhile, the NDC easily chose John Atta Mills as its candidate for the third time, though it too

experienced some internal conflict as Atta Mills and Rawlings continued to clash.

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 both domestic and international observers. Akufo-Addo won the first round with 49 percent, while Atta Mills took 48 percent. However, Atta Mills won the runoff with just 50.23 percent. His inauguration in January 2009 marked the second-ever peaceful, democratic transfer of power in Ghana. The NDC also won concurrent parliamentary elections, taking 114 seats as the NPP secured 107.

In August 2009, the parliamentary vote at six polling stations in Akwatia was rerun, since the initial results from December 2008 had been disputed. While the seat was awarded to the NPP candidate as expected, the unhindered rerun served as another demonstration of the stability of Ghana's democratic system.

After assuming office, Atta Mills faced the difficult task of fulfilling at least some of his campaign pledges while also steering the country through the global economic crisis. Nonetheless, some NDC supporters, backed by Rawlings, soon began complaining about the new president's inability to fulfill his promises or "support those who supported him"—a reference to the patronage networks that continue to underlie Ghanaian politics. Perceived corruption within the NPP was an important election issue, so Atta Mills's decision to investigate a number of former cabinet ministers and NPP officials for corruption was well received, though NPP officials alleged that the cases were politicized.

While Ghana has been working to move away from donor dependency, the government was forced to make exceptions for 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." The government also expected to benefit from new oil production beginning in 2010.

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, which won 114 and 107 Parliament seats, respectively, in the latest elections. Smaller parties and independents hold the remainder.

One of President John Atta Mills's campaign promises was to weed out corruption and improve governance. His predecessor, John Kufuor of the NPP, had a "zero-tolerance" policy on corruption, but his administration made less progress than anticipated. Critics often alleged that investigations were overly politicized, and corruption within the NPP government was believed to be extensive. The new NDC administration used the Bureau of National Investigation to examine corruption allegations against a number of former NPP officials, including Kufuor's chief of

staff, the health and information ministers, and the foreign minister. While many Ghanaians supported these initial investigations, there were few real successes and no convictions by year's end. Nonetheless, in November the cabinet approved a Right to Information Bill that could pave the way to greater government transparency if passed by Parliament in 2010. Ghana ratified the UN Convention Against Corruption in 2007 and was ranked 69 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 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, in 2009 there were a large number of assaults on and acts of intimidation against journalists, often perpetrated by NPP or NDC supporters. Internet access is unrestricted.

Religious freedom is protected by law and generally respected. 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 in 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. In 2005, the government removed all fees for access to primary and secondary education, and in 2009 it was reported that primary school enrollment was as high as 85 percent for boys and 78 percent for girls. At the same time, many teachers have complained of neglect by Atta Mills, citing low salaries and recent reductions in some of their allowances.

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed, and permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. With the election season over, there were fewer demonstrations in 2009 and no attempts by the government to prevent public gatherings. Nonetheless, disgruntled NDC supporters seeking greater rewards for their electoral work staged a number of protests, with some even attacking government buildings and demanding jobs.

Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, which conform to International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, workers have the right to form or 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. It remains to be seen whether its performance will improve under the new government.

While Atta Mills pardoned 1,021 prisoners in 2009 to celebrate the birthday of Kwame Nkrumah, easing the strain on prison infrastructure, prisons remain seriously overcrowded and often feature life-threatening conditions.

While communal and ethnic violence occasionally flares in Ghana, often due to tribal rivalries in the north, no such violence was reported in 2009.

Ghanaians are generally free to travel throughout the country despite occasional police-imposed curfews and roadblocks erected by security forces or civilians seeking payments from motorists. Road conditions are dismal, and car accidents are one of the leading causes of death in the country. According to the United Nations' Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 602 people died in road accidents between January and March 2009, up from 399 in the same period in 2008.

Despite their equal rights under the law, women suffer societal discrimination, especially in rural areas where opportunities for education and wage employment are limited. And although a domestic violence law was passed in 2007, few victims report such crimes because of the persistent stigma attached to them. However, women's enrollment in universities is increasing, and there are a number of high-ranking women in the current government. For the first time, women hold the positions of speaker of Parliament, police inspector general, and attorney general.

The country serves as a source and transit point for human trafficking, including for child 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.*