



Freedom in the World 2013 - Ghana

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2013 Scores

Status: Free
Freedom Rating: 1.5
Civil Liberties: 2
Political Rights: 1

Overview

In July 2012, President John Atta Mills unexpectedly died after three and a half years in office, and Vice President John Mahama was quickly sworn in for the remainder of the term. In December, Mahama was chosen as Ghana's president in a close and polarized election, with the president's party winning a majority of seats in concurrent legislative elections. Meanwhile, several high-level government officials resigned early in the year in the wake of a corruption scandal.

Ghana achieved independence from British rule in 1957. After the 1966 ouster of its independence leader, Kwame Nkrumah, the country was rocked 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, handing power to an elected president, Hilla Limann. However, Limann was overthrown in another coup led by Rawlings in 1981. Rawlings proved to be brutally repressive, banning political parties and quelling all dissent. While he ultimately agreed 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 2000 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), after he soundly defeated NDC candidate John Atta Mills. Kufuor was reelected in 2004, once again defeating Atta Mills. The NDC alleged irregularities, though international observers judged the elections to be generally free and fair.

In the December 2008 presidential election, Atta Mills defeated former foreign minister Nana Akufo-Addo of the NPP by less than 1 percent in a runoff vote. Despite some problems with voter

registration and sporadic violence at the polls, the election was ultimately viewed as a success. The NDC also won concurrent parliamentary elections.

In July 2011, Rawlings's wife, Nana Konadu Agyemang Rawlings, unsuccessfully challenged Atta Mills for the right to represent the NDC in the 2012 presidential election. In October, Rawlings was chosen as the candidate for a new party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), but was subsequently barred from running due to the late submission of her nomination forms. The NPP again nominated Akufo-Addo as its candidate.

On July 24, 2012, Atta Mills died suddenly at the age of 68 from a massive stroke. He was quickly succeeded by Vice President John Dramani Mahama, and observers praised the quick and smooth transfer of power. In August, the NDC named Mahama as its candidate in the December 2012 presidential election. Kwesi Bekoe Amissah-Arther, the head of the bank of Ghana, was chosen as Mahama's vice president and running mate.

Divisions within the NDC – heightened by personal criticism of the late Atta Mills by Rawlings and his wife – led many observers to predict that the 2012 presidential and legislative polls would be extremely contentious. In anticipation of potential violence, all major political parties agreed in 2011 to curtail vitriolic campaign language and to denounce the use of intimidation tactics. Similarly, in 2012, the Institute of Economic Affairs, a public policy think tank, created an enforcement body including civil society members and representatives from the Electoral Commission to monitor adherence to its 2012 Political Parties' Code of Conduct. The Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association also agreed to its own code of conduct.

On December 7, Mahama was elected with just 50.7 percent of the vote, while Afuko-Addo took 47.7 percent. In concurrent parliamentary elections, the NDC captured 148 seats and the NPP took 123. Limited technical problems, including the breakdown of some new biometric voter machines used to register and identify voters, led to the extension of voting by a day at many polling places. While international and domestic observers praised the elections and reported only limited violence, the opposition disputed the results and questioned the neutrality of the Electoral Commission. On December 28, the NPP filed a legal suit before the Supreme Court contesting the presidential election results.

Ghana's economy has experienced steady growth in recent years. China has become a rising source of external funding; during Atta Mills's visit to Beijing in 2010, Ghana and China signed agreements totaling \$15 billion in support of infrastructure projects. The government has faced challenges managing the rapidly growing revenues – and the resulting high public expectations – from the Jubilee offshore oilfield, discovered in 2007. Ghana began producing oil for the first time in December 2010 and received a \$3 billion loan in June 2012 from the China Development Bank for gas and oil development. In 2012, Mahama proceeded with setting up foreign oil contracts without authorizing legislation in place, demonstrating the level of executive authority the president has in managing this new resource.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Ghana is an electoral democracy. 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. The political system is dominated by two rival parties: the NPP and the NDC. In May 2012, the Electoral Commission completed a nationwide update of the voter roster using biometric registration. The NPP accused the NDC of rigging the process, though the local Coalition of Domestic Election Observers deemed it to have been largely successful.

Government corruption continues to be a significant problem, and anticorruption laws are rarely implemented effectively. The NDC administration has used the Bureau of National Investigation to examine corruption allegations against a number of former NPP officials, leading the NPP to

claim that these efforts are politicized. In February 2012, Ghana's Economic and Organized Crimes Offices released a report on the "Woyome scandal," which involved a judgment payment of around \$36 million to Alfred Woyome, an NDC financier, after an alleged breach of contract for a government construction project; the report concluded that the unusually high payment was the result of corruption and incompetence. In early 2012, the government arrested Woyome, the former chief state attorney, and the legal director in the Ministry of Finance, all of whom pled not guilty and were released on bail. During the October-November United Nations Universal Periodic Review of Ghana, the government accepted several recommendations to combat corruption in the public sector, including measures to protect freedom of expression in the judiciary. Ghana was ranked 64 out of 176 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. Numerous private radio stations operate, and many independent newspapers and magazines are published in Accra. However, the government occasionally restricts press freedom through harassment and arrests of journalists reporting on politically sensitive issues. A law prohibiting "publishing false news with intent to cause fear or harm to the public or to disturb the public peace" has at times been loosely applied. In January 2012, several agents of the Bureau of National Investigations attacked a reporter for the private *Daily Guide* when she attempted to photograph the deputy superintendent of police, who was being investigated for cocaine smuggling. In June, four police officers assaulted a reporter for the state-owned *Daily Graphic*, who was covering a drug raid conducted by the police. The government indicated that it was investigating both cases, but no charges had been brought against either by year's end.

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. Human rights groups 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 generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. Civil society organizations have noted that political party "foot soldiers" – activists who assist campaigns by distributing literature and generating crowds, among other activities – have been known to use violence and aggression; however, this trend seemed to subside to some extent during the 2012 election. Nongovernmental organizations are generally able to operate freely. Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, workers have the right to form and join trade unions. However, the government forbids action in a number of essential industries, including fuel distribution, public transportation, and the prison system. In February 2012, Ghana's Trades Union Congress called off planned strikes after reaching an agreement with the government over ending subsidies for oil products.

Ghanaian courts have acted with increased autonomy, 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, though some observers have raised doubts about its impartiality and respect for due process. Prisons suffer from overcrowding and often life-threatening conditions, and many prisoners experience lengthy pretrial detention. In an attempt to reduce overcrowding, a new prison for 2,000 inmates received its first prisoners in 2012.

Communal and ethnic violence occasionally flares in Ghana. In June 2012, violence erupted in the Hohoe area of Ghana's Volta region between residents of Hohoe and youth from the Muslim Zongo community in response to the exhumation of the body of a local Muslim imam. At least four people were killed and several thousand residents were displaced.

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 there are a number of high-ranking women in the current government. Women won 30 of the 275 seats in the December 2012 parliamentary elections. Despite legal protections, few victims report cases of rape or domestic violence due to the associated stigma. Same-sex sexual activity among men is illegal, and individuals suspected of homosexual relations face discrimination and abuse. People with mental disabilities also face discrimination and are frequently subjected to abuse in psychiatric institutions and "prayer camps." In June 2012, Ghana's Mental Health Act, which allows those with disabilities to challenge their detention in hospitals, went into effect, though it does not apply to those living in camps.

Ghana serves as a source, transit point, and destination for the trafficking of women and children for labor and sexual exploitation. The police's Anti-Human Trafficking Unit maintains nine regional units, but they are underfunded and have limited capacity. In March 2012, the government launched a monitoring system to track children in the Volta region to prevent child labor and trafficking.

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