

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - Ghana (2007)

Population:
22,600,000

Capital:
Accra

Political Rights Score: 1

Civil Liberties Score: 2

Status: Free

Overview

Early in 2006, several important members of the National Democratic Congress, the main opposition party, split off and formed a rival party that may present a threat to the current two-party dominance of the political system in the 2008 presidential election. In September, thousands of secondary-school teachers seeking better wages staged a two-month strike that affected 360,000 students. Also, despite Ghana's current constitution, succession disputes continue to occur over chieftaincy in the Northern regions; in 2006 this led to bouts of violence and months of government-imposed curfews in the region. Finally, in a slight deterioration of press freedoms, Ghanaian journalists in 2006 were subject to a number of attacks and acts of intimidation, primarily by supporters of several drug barons who were on trial.

Ghana, long known as the Gold Coast, had once been a major center for the slave trade. It emerged from British rule in 1957, becoming sub-Saharan Africa's first European colony to achieve independence. After the 1966 overthrow 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 each other in both incompetence and dishonesty.

In 1979, Jerry Rawlings led a coup against the ruling military junta and, as promised, returned power to a civilian government after a purge of corrupt senior army officers. However, the new civilian administration did not live up to Rawlings's expectations. He seized power again in December 1981 and set up the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), claiming that the move was necessary to restore a worthy government to the people of Ghana. Despite its populist objectives, the PNDC proved to be a brutally repressive enterprise, banning political parties and free expression and quelling all dissent. In the late 1980s, Rawlings was faced with a crumbling economy and increasingly intense demands for genuine political representation. He responded to the first problem by transforming Ghana into an early model for the structural adjustment programs urged by international lenders; he eventually responded to the second challenge by agreeing to the adoption of a new constitution in 1992 that legalized political parties. The subsequent elections, however, were considered neither free nor fair, and Rawlings was confirmed as head of state.

Ghanaians were finally given their first opportunity to choose their representatives in genuine elections in December 1996. But even that balloting, which was

generally regarded as free and fair, assured Rawlings of his place in the presidency thanks to opposition disunity and the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) party's extensive use of state media and patronage.

In 2000, Ghana's presidential and parliamentary polls were not only widely considered to be free and fair, but were hailed in Africa and abroad as a successful test of the democratic process. The presidential poll marked the first time in Ghana's history that one democratically elected president was succeeded by another. The opposition, led by John Kufuor and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), alleged intimidation in the second round of voting as the results came in, but it soon became apparent that they had actually won soundly with 57 percent of the vote, compared with 43 percent for Rawlings's chosen successor, John Atta Mills. During concurrent legislative polls, the opposition also broke the NDC's stranglehold on Parliament.

Kufuor won 53 percent of the vote in the December 2004 presidential election, followed again by Atta Mills, with 44 percent. The two other presidential candidates, Edward Mahama of the Grand Coalition (GC) and George Aggudey of the Convention People's Party (CPP), won less than 2 percent each. The Ghanaian constitution requires a runoff between the top two candidates if the leading candidate received 51 percent of the vote or less in the first round. Given the proximity of Kufuor's 53 percent to this limit, Atta Mills and the NDC alleged irregularities and called for a vote recount, but the Electoral Commission turned down the request.

In that year's legislative elections, in which candidates from eight parties contested 230 parliamentary seats, the NPP maintained its majority. It won 128 seats, followed by the NDC with 94 seats, the GC with four, the CPP with three, and an independent who took the remaining seat. An alliance of civil society groups, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, deployed thousands of monitors across the country for both polls. Some sporadic violence was reported, as well as a few incidents of intimidation and other irregularities, but domestic and international observers judged the elections to have been generally free and fair.

Both the NPP and the NDC held national congresses to elect their respective leaders in December 2005. The events have become a regular part of the Ghanaian political process, and they served as previews for the next presidential campaign in 2008. During the NPP congress, Kufuor made a brief appearance but left early, apparently to show that the NPP's internal decision making was free from presidential influence. The number of presidential hopefuls in the NPP alone ranges from 18 to 24, often changing on a daily basis. In contrast, evidence that Rawlings supporters had used force, threats, and physical intimidation against dissenters within the NDC cast a shadow over that party's congress. As a result, a number of high-profile NDC members defected and worked throughout 2006 to form an alternative party, the Democratic Freedom Party. It remained unclear whether the new party would present a serious challenge to either the NPP or the NDC. Much of the uncertainty stemmed from predictions of additional NDC defections; many politicians were waiting until the 2008 elections drew nearer before committing themselves to one faction or the other.

On the whole, Ghana has become a relatively peaceful country in a region plagued

by conflict and instability. However, tribal disagreement over the successor to the throne of a paramount chief turned violent in January 2006, when supporters of the two rival claimants clashed in the northern town of Bimbilla. The Northern Regional Security Council imposed months of curfews on Bimbilla and the surrounding areas to ensure that the conflict did not intensify. The incident was reminiscent of 1994 fighting between the Konkomba and Nanumba ethnic groups in the north, which left 1,000 people dead and caused 150,000 others to flee their homes.

Driven by high global prices for cocoa and gold, two of Ghana's main exports, the country's growth rate has exceeded 5 percent for the past two years. In addition, the Kufuor administration's reputation for good governance has won aid from foreign donors. Ghana qualified in 2004 for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which will slash the country's \$6 billion external debt in half over 20 years and reduce debt-service payments each year. However, as a crucial and often overlooked requirement for debt relief, Ghana is required to stop or reduce significantly its borrowing and donor dependence; this has not happened yet, and is unlikely to occur in the near future as international borrowing and donations are an integral component of Ghana's current economic and political stability. Nonetheless, Japan has also canceled its \$1 billion in Ghanaian debt. In August 2006, Kufuor signed an agreement with the U.S.-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation to receive \$547 million to target poverty—the largest grant awarded by the corporation to date. Despite those gains, Ghana remains highly dependent on foreign aid, and any shift in the country's economic fortunes is likely to affect the electoral outcome in 2008.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Ghana is an electoral democracy. The December 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections were considered generally fair and competitive. The president and vice president are directly elected on the same ticket for four-year terms. Members of Ghana's unicameral, 230-seat Parliament are also elected for four-year terms. In February 2006, the president signed the Representation of the People Amendment Act, giving Ghanaians living overseas the right to vote. The Parliament had quickly passed the bill during a boycott by many NDC lawmakers, who vehemently opposed the measure.

The country's political system is dominated by the ruling NPP and the opposition NDC, which has held power in the past. A number of smaller parties also hold seats in Parliament, and a splinter faction of the NDC emerged in 2006 as a new party that could draw significant support in future elections.

The government of President John Kufuor has made efforts to improve transparency and reduce corruption, but graft remains a widespread problem, and political patronage has deep roots. In 2003, the government passed the Public Procurement Act, the Financial Management Act, and the Audit Service Act to promote public sector accountability and combat corruption. But a lack of implementation capacity has prevented the legislation from fully taking effect, and the 2006 draft budget has not provided sufficient resources to reverse this trend. In order to demonstrate continued progress in the fight against corruption, Kufuor conducted a massive reshuffle of government ministries in early 2006. The move

reduced some of the bureaucratic overlap between ministries and forced out a number of ministers who had been implicated in corruption scandals. However, other graft-tainted ministers remained in office and were not recommended for investigation. Ghana was ranked 70 out of 163 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index, down five places from 2005 but still among the top five countries in Africa.

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Numerous private radio stations operate, and many independent newspapers and magazines are published in Accra with relatively high levels of professionalism for the region. Significantly though, Ghana has yet to pass legislation protecting freedom of information. A civil society initiative in 1997 brought the need for such a bill to the nation's attention, but neither the president nor the Parliament has taken any action as yet. Internet access is unrestricted.

In 2006, journalists experienced a troubling spate of intimidation and harassment related to a series of cocaine scandals being investigated in the courts. In response to the attacks, the Ghana Journalists Association released a statement threatening legal action against anyone who engages in harassment of reporters. Nonetheless, shortly after that announcement, an independent radio journalist was attacked by five policemen and briefly detained just outside of Accra.

Religious freedom is respected, and the government continued its prosecution of perpetrators of religious violence in 2006.

Academic freedom is also guaranteed and respected. In 2005, in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals for education, the government removed all fees for access to primary and secondary education, though university tuitions remain. As a result, student enrollment has risen by more 16 percent since the new policy was implemented. Ghana's educational system is struggling to keep up with the increase, and the government has turned to churches and community centers to help provide locations for instruction. Also in 2005, the vice chancellor of the University for Development Studies reportedly banned tribal associations from campus for the 2005-2006 academic year in order to promote school unity and discourage ethnic divisions. A separate, nationwide ban on campus demonstrations remains in place but has been neither enforced nor challenged.

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed, and permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. In February 2006, NDC members of Parliament (MPs) who fervently opposed the bill enabling Ghanaians living overseas to vote led a series of mass protests in Accra. Though demonstrators were quite impassioned and participating MPs boycotted Parliament, the entire exercise was carried out without violence or police repression. Numerous nongovernmental organizations also operate openly and freely.

Under 2003 labor laws that conform to International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions, every worker has the right to form or join a trade union. About 20 percent of the workforce is employed in the formal sector, but less than 9 percent of those are unionized, partly due to a weak economy. At the beginning of the academic year in September 2006, thousands of secondary-school teachers went on strike to obtain better pay. The action affected more than 360,000 students and persisted until early November, when the teachers returned to work but demanded

pay for the month they had spent on strike. The Accra High Court found the strike to be illegal, but the National Association of Graduate Teachers maintains that they only returned due to public concern about how the strike would affect students' education.

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 frequently tempted by bribes. Traditional courts play a significant role in Ghanaian justice, since much of the population, particularly in the north of the country, still looks to tribal leaders to resolve disputes. A parliamentary committee on judicial corruption has recommended establishing and enforcing codes of conduct, disciplinary mechanisms, and transparent complaint procedures.

While the government has taken steps to improve prisons, conditions are harsh and sometimes life-threatening. Cells are overcrowded, and officials do not provide prisoners with adequate nutrition or medical care. Delays in the prosecution of the accused, caused by imperfections in the judicial system, often lead to extended periods of pretrial detention. Security forces manning checkpoints to catch criminals and seize weapons occasionally solicit bribes from motorists.

Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission finished hearing testimony from more than 2,000 people in 2004. While the hearings covered all of Ghana's history since independence, much of the focus was on the early years of then-president Jerry Rawlings's rule in the 1980s. The proceedings were seen as a test of Ghana's ability to look into its past, acknowledge its failings, and continue to move democratically into the future. In 2006, following the commission's recommendation, Kufuor's administration began paying reparations to the 2,000 victims in amounts ranging from \$217 to \$3,300, depending on the severity of the crime in question.

Communal and ethnic violence occasionally flares in Ghana. The north of the country in particular is dominated by various tribal associations, many of which have ties to major political parties based in the south. Disagreement over the successor to the throne of a paramount chief in the north turned violent in January 2006, when supporters of the two rivals for the seat clashed in the northern town of Bimbila. Fears persist that ethnic tensions could lead to a wider political conflict if the NPP or the NDC were to intervene on behalf of a particular ethnic group.

Ghana is home to about 62,000 refugees from countries all over the region, but according to the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, the majority of these (39,000) come from Liberia. Refugees from Togo (16,000) are also present, having fled their country when violence broke out in the wake of the 2005 death of President Gnassingbe Eyadema. Tensions exist between refugees and local populations, but no hostile acts occurred in 2006.

Ghanaians are generally free to travel throughout the country despite occasional road blocks erected by security forces or civilians looking to make money. But in January, as a result of the ongoing chieftaincy dispute in Bimbilla, the Northern Regional Security Council imposed a curfew on the city and its surrounding area. Eventually, as the tension dissipated, the MP for Bimbilla campaigned for an end to the curfew, arguing that it posed a serious health risk by forcing residents to sleep

indoors in the seasonal heat. The curfew was eventually lifted at the end of April.

Despite their equal rights under the law, Ghanaian women suffer societal discrimination that is particularly serious in rural areas, where opportunities for education and wage employment are limited. Women's enrollment in universities, however, is increasing, and more girls than boys enrolled in primary and secondary education throughout the country in 2005. Domestic violence against women is said to be common but often goes unreported. A domestic violence bill was debated in Parliament in 2006 but has yet to be passed. In the course of the debate, a provision that protects against marital rape was removed. A member of the National African Peer Review Mechanism Governing Council argued that the bill would be discriminatory if it were to pass without the provision because it would provide more protection for those experiencing extramarital sexual violence than those subject to sexual exploitation by their spouses.

Female genital mutilation was made illegal in Ghana in 1994, and those who perform the operation face a prison sentence of at least three years. In October 2006, Parliament began debating an amendment to the 1994 law that would extend its reach to relatives or guardians who give their consent for the procedure to be performed.

In 2005, Ghana passed a human trafficking bill, and has since taken steps to discourage the trafficking of children by increasing the registration of infants at birth and extending microloans to over 1,000 mothers whose poverty might otherwise force them to sell their children. The government has not yet prosecuted anyone under the new law.