

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - Ghana (2008)

Capital:
Accra

Population:
23,000,000

Political Rights Score: 1
Civil Liberties Score: 2
Status: Free

Overview

In July 2007, eight cabinet ministers resigned in order to vie for the presidential nomination of the ruling New Patriotic Party ahead of the 2008 elections. In December, the party elected Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the former minister of foreign affairs, as its candidate. Meanwhile, corruption cases plagued both the ruling party and the opposition National Democratic Congress. Severe flooding hit the country in August, killing an estimated 22 people and destroying more than 20,000 homes.

Ghana 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 one another in both incompetence and dishonesty.

In 1979, air force officer 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, he seized power again in December 1981, claiming that the move was necessary to restore a worthy government to Ghana. Despite its populist objectives, Rawlings's new administration proved to be brutally repressive, banning political parties and quelling all dissent. In the late 1980s, faced with a crumbling economy and mounting demands for political representation, Rawlings agreed to legalize political parties and hold elections. However, the subsequent voting, in which Rawlings was confirmed as head of state, was considered neither free nor fair. More genuine elections were held in 1996, but Rawlings and the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) party retained power thanks to opposition disunity and the exploitation of state media and resources.

The 2000 presidential and parliamentary polls were widely considered to be free and fair. They also marked the first time in Ghana's history that one democratically elected president was succeeded by another, as the term-limited Rawlings stepped down. The opposition, led by John Kufuor and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), alleged intimidation in the second round of presidential voting, but it soon became clear that Kufuor had won soundly with 57 percent of the vote, compared with 43 percent for Vice President John Atta Mills of the NDC. During concurrent legislative polls, the opposition broke the NDC's stranglehold on Parliament.

Kufuor was reelected in 2004 with 53 percent of the vote, followed by Atta Mills with 44 percent. The constitution requires a runoff between the top two candidates if the front-runner receives 51 percent of the vote or less in the first round. Given

the proximity of Kufuor's 53 percent to this limit, the NDC alleged irregularities and called for a vote recount, but the Electoral Commission turned down the request.

In that year's legislative elections, the NPP won 128 seats, and the NDC took 94. An alliance of civil society groups, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, deployed thousands of monitors across the country for both 2004 polls. Sporadic violence was reported, as were a few incidents of intimidation and other irregularities, but domestic and international observers judged the elections to have been generally free and fair.

Preparations for the 2008 elections dominated the Ghanaian political scene for the next three years. While the NDC maintained an appearance of party unity, its chosen presidential candidate—again Atta Mills—continued to be associated with the corruption and mismanagement of the Rawlings administration. The NPP faced internal division, as some 20 rivals vied to succeed Kufuor. Eight of the NPP candidates were cabinet ministers who were forced to resign in July 2007 in order to campaign. Beginning on December 14, members of the NPP met to elect their party's presidential candidate. Nana Adoo Dankwa Akufo-Addo—most recently the minister of foreign affairs—won the nomination with 48 percent of the vote. Though he fell short of the 50 percent required to cinch the nomination, the second-place candidate conceded defeat in the name of party unity. Corruption charges tainted both of the leading political parties in 2007. Daniel Abodakpi, an NDC lawmaker, was sentenced in February to 10 years in prison for causing financial losses to the state. That brought the number of NDC politicians serving prison time for fraud to five, although Abodakpi was the first sitting member of Parliament to be sentenced. In May, a court in the United States indicted Nana Amoakoh, an NPP lawmaker, on charges of grand larceny and money laundering.

Ghana has become a relatively peaceful country in a region plagued by conflict and instability. However, violence occasionally flares up, particularly concerning the installation of regional chiefs. In 2006, rival clans in the northern town of Bimbilla clashed over who was the rightful heir to the throne of a paramount chief. Tribal riots erupted in Accra in June 2007, after it was alleged that the NPP had worked to install a regional chief in the Ga tribe who was favorable to their cause.

In August and September 2007, severe flooding hit much of West Africa, but Ghana was the worst affected. By the end of the year, Kufuor had declared three regions in the north to be disaster areas, an estimated 22 people had lost their lives, and more than 20,000 homes had been destroyed. The situation deteriorated further when neighboring Burkina Faso opened a dam to relieve pressure from the floodwaters.

The Kufuor administration's reputation for good governance has won aid from foreign donors, but Ghana has recently been working to move away from donor dependency and toward a self-sufficient economy. In August 2006, Kufuor signed an agreement with the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation to receive \$547 million in antipoverty aid—the largest grant awarded by the corporation to date.

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 the 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. Parliament had quickly passed the bill during a boycott by NDC lawmakers, who vehemently opposed the measure. Many observers believe it could benefit the NPP in the 2008 elections.

The political system is dominated by the ruling NPP and the opposition NDC. A number of smaller parties also hold seats in Parliament, and their support for one of the two main parties could be a deciding factor in the election of the next president.

The government of President John Kufuor has made efforts to improve transparency and reduce corruption, but these have rarely proven successful, and the graft problem continued to grow in 2007. The year's two most prominent cases each involved a member of Parliament—one from the NPP and one from the NDC. The NDC also accused the Kufuor administration of corruption and nepotism in the cabinet reshuffling that followed the July resignation of eight ministers. One of the new cabinet members, the deputy minister of manpower, youth, and employment, was currently facing allegations in court of financial mismanagement and sexual deviance. Ghana was ranked 69 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2007 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, Ghana has yet to pass legislation protecting freedom of information. The situation for the media noticeably deteriorated in 2007, as a number of journalists suffered violent harassment or abuse during the year. In the most serious incident, Samuel Enin, news editor for the radio station Ash FM and the regional chairman of the Ghana Journalists' Association, was shot and killed by two unknown assailants in February. It was unclear whether the attack was related to his work. Internet access is unrestricted.

Religious freedom is respected, and the government continued its prosecution of perpetrators of religious violence in 2007.

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. Student enrollment has risen by more 16 percent since the new policy was implemented, putting a strain on the education system. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport claims that the country needs 17,000 additional teachers and 13,400 new schools in order to deal with the increase in the student body.

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed, and permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. 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 the weak economy. In 2006, secondary-school teachers staged a nationwide strike for better pay, but the Accra High Court found the action to be illegal. Health workers went on strike sporadically in 2007, demanding

better pay and infrastructure. Though they were peaceful, these strikes proved to be relatively ineffective.

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. In June 2007, Parliament approved the nomination of Georgina Theodora Wood as the new chief justice. Wood served on the Supreme Court since 2002 and promised to do more to protect women's rights. She also indicated that problems with the judicial infrastructure, particularly the lack of adequate courtrooms, needed to be addressed for the courts to function effectively.

While the government has taken steps to improve prisons, conditions remain harsh and sometimes life threatening. Delays in the prosecution of the accused often lead to extended periods of pretrial detention. In order to mark the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence, the Kufuor administration in 2007 freed or commuted the sentences of 1,206 prisoners, some of whom were on death row.

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. However, in 2007 it was the Accra region in the south that experienced a series of riots in response to the NPP's alleged involvement in the nomination of a new chief to the Ga tribe. Police fired plastic bullets in an effort to disperse the rioters, but no one was seriously injured.

Ghanaians are generally free to travel throughout the country despite occasional roadblocks erected by security forces or civilians seeking payments from motorists. In addition, citizens from neighboring countries are free to travel to Ghana. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ghana currently hosts some 46,000 refugees and 5,500 asylum seekers from around the region. That figure is an improvement over the 62,000 refugees reported in 2006. The reduction stems from the UN's effort to repatriate 15,000 Liberians and the return of a few thousand Togolese refugees as the political situations in both countries have begun to improve.

Despite their equal rights under the law, Ghanaian 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. Domestic violence against women is said to be common but often goes unreported, and even formal complaints are rarely resolved in court. Sexual violence against girls is a particular problem in the country's otherwise thriving educational sector. Female genital mutilation was outlawed in 1994, and those who perform the operation face a prison sentence of at least three years. In 2007, the government proposed revising the law so that it punishes anyone who gives permission for the procedure, including family members. Nonetheless, the proposed measure had not been passed by year's end. Ghana has yet to ratify the African Union Protocol on Women's Rights.