



Freedom in the World 2018 - Ghana

Publisher [Freedom House](#)

Publication Date 15 March 2018

Cite as Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018 - Ghana*, 15 March 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ab8bd2da.html> [accessed 10 December 2018]

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 83 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 1.5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 1 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 2 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 28,200,000

Capital: Accra

GDP/capita: \$1,361

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Since 1992, Ghana has held competitive multiparty elections that have led to peaceful transfers of power between the two main political parties. Although Ghana has a relatively strong record of upholding civil liberties, discrimination against women and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continues. Some weaknesses in judicial independence and rule of law persist, and political corruption presents challenges to government performance.

Key Developments in 2017:

- The January inauguration of President Nana Akufo-Addo, the candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), represented the third peaceful transfer of presidential power between the country's two main parties: the NPP, and the National Democratic Congress (NDC).
- In November, the parliament approved legislation to establish the Office of the Special Prosecutor. The office, which at year's end had yet to be established, is a key component of Akufo-Addo's anticorruption program.
- In March, a vigilante group allegedly connected to the NPP responded to President Akufo-Addo's appointment of George Adjei as the Ashanti Region's Security Coordinator by physically attacking Adjei.
- Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC) was plagued by controversy during the year. In July, it was reported that the Economic and Organized Crime Office had begun investigating allegations that senior EC officials had misappropriated funds in 2012 and 2013. In November, the country's chief justice assembled a panel charged with investigating an array of corruption claims against EC chairperson Charlotte Osei.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 12 / 12

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

International and domestic observers generally praised the December 2016 presidential election, and all major political parties accepted the results. Akufo-Addo, the NPP candidate, won with 53.9 percent of the vote, while incumbent John Mahama of the NDC took 44.4 percent.

Although the election and its immediate aftermath were peaceful, the campaign period was contentious. There were several reports of clashes between NPP and NDC supporters, as well as attacks on EC officials. Moreover, representatives of civil society raised concerns about what they claimed were alarming levels of hate speech used by politicians, as well as alleged abuse of state resources.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4

Ghana has a unicameral, 275-seat parliament to which members are elected directly, and serve four-year terms. International and domestic observers generally praised the December 2016 parliamentary elections, which were held at the same time as the presidential election. The NPP captured 169 seats while the NDC, which had held a majority going into elections, took the 106 remaining seats.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 4 / 4

Despite controversy surrounding the preparation for the December 2016 balloting, domestic and international observers generally commended the EC for the conduct of the elections. The EC had disqualified 13 presidential candidates in October 2016 due to irregularities with their nomination papers or failure to pay the nomination fee. The Supreme Court rescinded the EC's decision in early November 2016, giving the disqualified candidates an opportunity to rectify the problems. In the end, three of the originally disqualified candidates were allowed to stand for election.

However, in 2017, the EC was embroiled in controversy as senior members of the commission accused each other of corruption and mismanagement, including the unlawful awarding of contracts, misappropriation of funds, and political bias. In response to petitions forwarded to her by President Akufo-Addo, Chief Justice Sophia Akuffo in November established a five-member judicial panel to investigate the allegations against Osei, the EC chairperson, and two of her deputies; Osei has launched a legal challenge of one of the petitions, claiming it is defamatory. In July, it was reported that the Economic and Organized Crime Office had begun investigating allegations that senior EC officials had misappropriated funds in 2012 and 2013.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 15 / 16

B1. 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 competing parties or groupings? 4 / 4

The constitution guarantees the right to form a political party, and this right is generally respected. However, a significant increase in candidate nomination fees for the 2016 elections, along with the difficulties in nomination procedures highlighted by the presidential candidate disqualifications, presented challenges to participation, especially for candidates from smaller parties. In September 2016, the Progressive People's Party (PPP) mounted an unsuccessful legal challenge against the nomination fees.

In March 2017, members of Delta Force, a pro-NPP vigilante group, attacked the Ashanti Region's new security coordinator, George Adjei; the attack came after the group had indicated its lack of support for Adjei. The following month, other members of Delta Force disrupted proceedings in a circuit court in Kumasi, the capital of the region, to release 13 suspects on trial for the attack against Adjei. Meanwhile, the trial of the Gregory Afoko, brother of former NPP chairman Paul Afoko, for the 2015 murder of the NPP chairperson of the Upper East Region, was ongoing at year's end.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4

Ghana's multiparty system provides ample opportunity for opposition parties to meaningfully participate in the political process. The NPP and the NDC dominate the political system. Mahama's defeat by Akufo-Addo in the 2016 presidential race represented the first time since the reintroduction of the multiparty system in 1992 that an incumbent president had stood for reelection and lost. Akufo-Addo's 2017 inauguration represented the country's third peaceful transfer of presidential power between the NPP and NDC.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 4 / 4

People's political choices are generally free from domination by powerful groups that are not democratically accountable.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 3 / 4

The legal framework provides for equal participation in political life for the country's various cultural, religious, and ethnic minorities. Women took 37 of the 275 parliamentary seats in the 2016 elections, the highest since the reintroduction of multiparty rule in 1992. However, women hold comparatively few leadership positions across the country, and in 2016 women candidates received less media coverage than men.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 10 / 12

C1. 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 undue interference.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Political corruption remains a problem, despite robust legal and institutional frameworks to combat it, active media coverage, and government anticorruption initiatives. The latter have not quieted criticism from the media, opposition parties, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who deem the efforts ineffective. In 2017, the new Akufo-Addo administration launched various anticorruption initiatives – including plans to establish the Office of Special Prosecutor, which received parliamentary approval in November – as well as a Fiscal Responsibility Council.

Opposition parties criticized President Akufo-Addo for increasing the size of the cabinet to 110 ministers and deputy ministers in March.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4

The government generally operates with transparency. However, despite over a decade of consideration by Parliament and continued efforts by advocates in 2017, the Right to Information Bill remained stalled.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 46 / 60

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 14 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4

Freedom of expression 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, and

several independent newspapers and magazines. The internet and social media remain unrestricted, despite some moves by the government prior to the 2016 elections to impose restrictions the latter; ultimately, the plans were abandoned following a public outcry. Government agencies occasionally restrict press freedom through harassment and arrests of journalists, especially those reporting on politically sensitive issues. In March 2017, freelance journalist Kendrick Ofei, said he was assaulted by soldiers as he recorded them attacking a civilian. Separately, in July, a court in Accra ruled that the editor and publishers of the *Daily Post* newspaper were guilty of defaming a former minister of state, Hackman Owusu-Agyemang, and ordered that they pay him GHC800,000 (\$180,000) in damages – an amount the Media Foundation of West Africa (MWFA) called excessive and said threatened the paper's continued existence. The newspaper had repeated unverified claims that Owusu-Agyemang released a secret taping from a meeting of NPP officials, with the intention of embarrassing the party.

D2. 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, Muslim families have said that compulsory Christian prayer sessions and church services that are widespread in Ghana's public schools seek to promote Christianity, and violate their children's religious freedom.

D3. 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. 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.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 11 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4

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

E3. 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 labor action in a number of industries, including fuel distribution, public transportation, and the prison system.

F. RULE OF LAW: 11 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 2 / 4

Judicial independence in Ghana 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. 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. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4

Ghana's prisons are overcrowded, and conditions are often life-threatening, though the prison service has attempted to reduce congestion and improve the treatment of inmates in recent years. Communal and ethnic violence occasionally flare in Ghana. In April 2017, a clash in Agbogbloshie, in Accra, between members of the Dagomba and Konkomba ethnic groups claimed two lives and left many others wounded.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 3 / 4

LGBT people face societal discrimination. In February 2017, parliament speaker Mike Ocquaye called for legislation that would explicitly ban all homosexual activities, though no such bill was forthcoming at year's end.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 10 / 16**G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 3 / 4**

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

Despite equal rights under the law, women suffer societal discrimination, especially in rural areas, where opportunities for education and employment are limited. However, women's enrollment in universities is increasing.

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

Weak rule of law, corruption, and an underregulated property rights system remain significant impediments to business confidence. Bribery is a common practice in starting a business and registering property.

G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

Domestic violence and rape are serious problems, and the practice of female genital mutilation continues in the north. The government has worked to combat gender-based violence, including by expanding the police's domestic violence and victim support unit and creating gender-based violence courts.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4

The exploitation of children in the agricultural and mining sectors remains a problem. The exploitation of children in the fishing industry too remains a problem, especially in the region surrounding Lake Volta. While the government has taken some steps in recent years, it has not implemented antitrafficking legislation or adequately funded antitrafficking agencies.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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