

Freedom in the World 2022 - Ghana

Free

80

/ 100

Political Rights 35 / 40Civil Liberties 45 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

82 / 100 Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Since 1992, Ghana has held competitive multiparty elections and undergone peaceful transfers of power between the two main political parties. Although the country has a relatively strong record of upholding civil liberties, discrimination against women and LGBT+ people persists. There are some weaknesses in judicial independence and the rule of law, corruption presents challenges to government performance, and political violence is a growing concern.

Key Developments in 2021

- Ghanaians sought to organize protests over economic and social concerns under the #FixTheCountry banner, but authorities attempted to stop a rally via a May injunction, which was overturned in June. Protesters were also subjected to violence; a #FixTheCountry supporter was killed by unidentified individuals in June while two people were killed by authorities during a protest held the day after the activist's death.
- In February, security officers raided the country's first LGBT+ community center, which faced significant opposition from political and religious figures as well as violent threats. Police closed the center later that month.
- In August, Parliament began considering a bill that would criminalize displays of affection, cross-dressing, and LGBT+ advocacy, the latter of which would be punished with prison sentences of up to 10 years. The bill was under consideration by a parliamentary committee as of December.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

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

The president, who serves as head of state and head of government, is directly elected for up to two four-year terms. President Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won a second term in the December 2020 presidential election with 51.3 percent of the vote, while his predecessor, John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), took 47.3 percent. African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) observers called the contest well-organized and generally peaceful, though EU monitors criticized a lack of campaign finance regulation and a misuse of state resources. Mahama rejected the results, alleging fraud, and issued a legal challenge. In March 2021, the Supreme Court dismissed Mahama's petition, stating that it lacked merit.

The immediate postelection period was marred by violence, with the national police reporting at least five deaths in the days following the vote. NDC supporters protested in parts of Ghana after the vote, notably marching on the Electoral Commission (EC) headquarters in Accra.

A2 0-4 pts

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

Members of the unicameral, 275-seat Parliament are elected directly in single-member constituencies to serve four-year terms.

The NPP, which held a majority in the previous parliament, and the NDC each won 137 seats in elections held concurrently with the 2020 presidential contest. One seat was won by an independent who agreed to support the NPP, giving that party a bare de facto majority. Monitors lauded the elections' overall conduct. Despite the NPP's majority, an NDC member was selected as speaker in January 2021.

A3 0-4 pts

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

Domestic and international observers consider the EC a capable manager of the electoral process. However, its composition has been the subject of political disagreement in the past; the 2018 appointment of Jean Mensa as its chairwoman was criticized by the NDC, which called her appointment partisan. Civil society largely lauded Mensa's selection, however.

In 2019, the EC announced plans to compile a new voter register ahead of the 2020 elections. The EC registered voters through an updated biometric system during two registration drives in 2020; while its efforts were largely successful, a number of minors and foreign-born residents were reportedly able to register, and NPP and NDC supporters clashed at some registration sites. AU electoral observers ultimately lauded the registration process and the EC's overall performance that December. In May 2021, the EC agreed to enact reforms after holding a conference with the Inter Party Advisory Committee, including the introduction of continuous voter registration.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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? 3 / 4

The constitution guarantees the right to form political parties, and this right is generally respected. However, civil society groups have expressed concern about the rising involvement of partisan vigilante groups in inter- and intraparty disputes.

Candidates, especially from smaller parties, were impeded in their ability to compete by an increase in registration fees. In 2020, Mensa announced that presidential candidates' filing fees would double compared to the 2016 amount.

B2 0-4 pts

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

There have been multiple peaceful transfers of power between the NPP and NDC and parties in opposition have meaningful opportunities to increase their public support and win office. Mahama's defeat in the 2016 presidential race marked the first time since the 1992 reintroduction of multiparty politics that an incumbent stood for reelection and lost.

While Ghanaian political contests are generally peaceful, politicians are sometimes victims of violence. One member of Parliament was shot and killed in October 2020, while another was attacked and hospitalized that December.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 3 / 4

Ghanaians are generally free from undue interference with their political choices by powerful groups that are not democratically accountable. However, voters and candidates are threatened by vigilantism and politically motivated violence despite the 2019 promulgation of the Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, which bans all political and other vigilante groups.

NPP and NDC supporters clashed at several voter registration sites in 2020—despite an agreement between the two parties to refrain from such activity—resulting in one death.

B4 0-4 pts

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

Ghanaian laws provide for equal participation in political life by the country's various cultural, religious, and ethnic groups. Women formally enjoy political equality but hold comparatively few leadership positions in practice. In 2020, the NDC selected Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang as its vice-presidential candidate, the first time a woman was placed on a major party's presidential ticket. Women won 40 parliamentary seats in that December's elections, a slight increase over the 2016 results and the largest share since the reintroduction of multiparty politics.

The National House of Chiefs, Ghana's highest body of customary authority, has been under pressure to include women as members.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

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 improper influence from unelected entities. However, the president gained the ability to more easily enact states of emergency under the Imposition of Restrictions Act (IRA). The IRA, which was passed by Parliament and signed by Akufo-Addo in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic became a global crisis, limited Parliament's ability to easily revoke presidentially declared states of emergency. The IRA was criticized by the NDC and legal scholars, who warned that the legislation was disproportionate and gave the executive wide-ranging powers. In May 2021, Akufo-Addo stated that the law would remain in force until more Ghanaians received COVID-19 vaccines.

C2 0-4 pts

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

Political corruption remains a problem despite active media coverage, fairly robust laws and institutions, and government antigraft initiatives. Legislation adopted in 2017 established the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) to investigate political corruption.

Former attorney general Martin Amidu was appointed special prosecutor in 2018 but resigned in 2020, citing a lack of resources as one of his reasons. Amidu also claimed that Akufo-Addo sought to interfere in a report on the planned transfer of mineral royalties to publicly owned Agyapa Royalties. The OSP warned that the plan, which envisioned Accra selling shares in the firm, could lead to "bid rigging" or "illicit financial flows." Amidu's deputy, Jane Cynthia Naa Torshie Lampitey, became acting special prosecutor immediately after his resignation. In August 2021, Kissi Agyebeng, a lawyer and academic, was appointed to the role. The government withdrew the Agyapa Royalties proposal after the OSP made its assessment, but vowed to submit a renewed proposal in October.

The administrations of former presidents John Atta Mills and Mahama were implicated in a bribery scheme in 2020, when European aircraft maker Airbus admitted to bribing individuals in Ghana and several other countries between 2011 and 2015. President Akufo-Addo referred the matter to the OSP that February. Later in 2020, the OSP named Mahama's brother a person of interest and reported that Mahama himself was directly implicated. However, Amidu elected not to open an investigation against Mahama before resigning.

C3 0-4 pts

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

The government operates with relative transparency, though there are weaknesses in the legal framework. The Right to Information Act, which grants citizens the right to seek, access, and receive information from public as well as some private institutions, came into effect in 2020.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4

Freedom of the press 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 as well as a number of independent newspapers and magazines. Online news media operate without government restrictions. Government agencies occasionally limit press freedom by harassing and arresting journalists, especially those reporting on politically sensitive issues.

Military and police personnel detained or attacked journalists on several occasions in 2021. In January, soldiers detained three staff members of Joy News, deleting some of their footage and damaging their vehicle before releasing them. In April, Accra police arrested Whatsup News editor in chief David Tamakloe, accusing him of the “publication of false news” and “extortion” after receiving a complaint from an interviewee before releasing him on bond. In May, Accra police detained and physically attacked Citi FM journalist Caleb Kudah after accusing him of photographing official vehicles. Police then impersonated Kudah to facilitate the arrest of another Citi FM colleague. Both were later released without charge.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public 3 / and private? 4

Religious freedom is constitutionally and legally protected, and the government largely upholds these protections in practice. However, public schools feature mandatory religious education courses drawing on Christianity and Islam, and Muslim students have allegedly been required to participate in Christian prayer sessions and church services in some publicly funded Christian schools.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political 4 / indoctrination? 4

Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and generally upheld in practice.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics 4 / without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4

Private discussion is both free and vibrant. The government does not restrict individual expression on social media.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 3 / 4

The right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. Assemblies can be restricted under COVID-19 regulations, however.

Ghanaians sought to organize protests over economic and social concerns under the #FixTheCountry banner during 2021 but were impeded by the authorities. In May, the Accra High Court granted an injunction against a proposed #FixTheCountry rally, though the Supreme Court overturned that decision in June. Later in June, 11 organizers protesting in front of the Accra High Court were arrested.

#FixTheCountry supporters faced violence as 2021 continued. In late June, unidentified assailants killed #FixTheCountry supporter Ibrahim Muhammed in the town of Ejura. Protesters in Ejura rallied the day after Muhammed's death; police and military personnel used live ammunition in subsequent clashes, killing two people and injuring at least four more.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because the authorities responded to mid-year protests by attempting to prevent legitimate demonstrations, arresting protesters, and firing live ammunition during protests.

E2 0-4 pts

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

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

E3 0-4 pts

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 organized labor action in a number of sectors, including fuel distribution and utilities, public transportation, and ports and harbor services.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 2 / 4

Judicial independence 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 0-4 pts

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 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war 3 / and insurgencies? 4

Prisons are overcrowded and conditions can be life threatening, though the prison service has attempted to reduce congestion and improve the treatment of inmates in recent years.

Communal and ethnic violence is known to occur in parts of Ghana. Communal violence that began in 2018 between members of the Konkomba and Chokosi ethnic groups in North East Region escalated in 2019. In 2020, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reported that 2,300 people had been internally displaced by that conflict.

Islamic militants and other armed groups active in the Sahel have reportedly taken refuge in the northern reaches of Ghana in recent years.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the 2 / population? 4

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

LGBT+ people face significant discrimination. Same-sex sexual activity remains criminalized, encouraging impunity for violence and harassment against LGBT+ people. LGBT+ Rights Ghana, which opened the country's first LGBT+ community center in January 2021, faced significant opposition from political and religious figures as well as violent threats. The center was raided by security officers in February and was closed by police later that month. In May, police arrested 21 people participating in a legal training workshop operated by Rightify Ghana, alleging that they sought to promote homosexuality. The participants, who were charged with unlawful assembly, were bailed in June.

A bill that would limit LGBT+ rights was also considered by Parliament in 2021. In early August, Parliament held its first reading of the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill. The bill would criminalize displays of affection and cross-dressing, while those engaging in LGBT+ advocacy would face prison sentences as long as 10 years. The bill was being considered by a parliamentary committee as of December.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because the persecution of LGBT+ people has increased—including through a wave of public harassment against the country's first LGBT+ community center, which was forced to shut down—and the authorities have contributed to the problem rather than protecting vulnerable citizens.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of 3 / residence, employment, or education? 4

Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the constitution and is generally respected by the government. However, poorly developed road networks and banditry can make travel outside the capital and tourist areas difficult. Police have been known to set up illegal checkpoints to demand bribes from travelers. Bribery is also rife in the education sector. Authorities instituted movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

G2 0-4 pts

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

Although the legal framework generally supports property ownership and private business activity, weaknesses in the rule of law, corruption, and an underregulated property rights system remain impediments. Bribery is a common practice when starting a business and registering property.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 3 / 4

While personal social freedoms are upheld in many respects and among large segments of the population, domestic violence and rape are serious problems, and harmful traditional practices including female genital mutilation (FGM) and early or forced marriage persist in certain regions.

The government has worked to combat gender-based violence (GBV), including by expanding the police's domestic violence and victim support units and creating special GBV courts, though such services are reportedly underresourced.

G4 0-4 pts

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

Most workers are employed in the informal sector, limiting the effectiveness of legal and regulatory safeguards for working conditions. The exploitation of children in the agricultural and mining sectors remains a problem. Similar abuses in the fishing industry have also been reported, especially in the region surrounding Lake Volta.

In its *Trafficking in Persons Report 2021*, the US State Department reported that the government was working to improve its human-trafficking response, but won no convictions against alleged sex traffickers and made little progress in the alleged involvement of government officials. The State Department also noted that law enforcement efforts remained underresourced.

ecoi.net summary:

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