

Freedom on the Net 2022 - Ghana

PARTLY FREE

64

/ 100

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LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

64 / 100 Partly Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). See the [research methodology](#) and [report acknowledgements](#).

Overview

Internet users in Ghana enjoy an information space that is largely free from technical censorship. However, the government is poised to vote on draft legislation which would criminalize online and offline activities that portray LGBT+ relationships in a positive way. If passed, internet service providers (ISPs) and website owners may proactively remove content to avoid being held liable for posts which support LGBT+ activities. Individuals increasingly risk arrest for posts related to the president, and online journalists face an increasing risk of harassment for their critical reporting.

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, June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022

- In January 2022, telecommunications provider MTN increased its prices for data packages; the company revealed that the National Communications Authority (NCA) had directed them to increase costs in order to enhance competition in the telecommunications sector (see A4).
- In June 2021, the government proposed the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, which imposes criminal penalties on individuals deemed to be advocating or promoting LGBT+ activities online. The bill also imposes criminal penalties on ISP owners who host pro-LGBT+ content, unless owners can show they took measures to prevent users from uploading this content (see B3 and C2).
- Users continued to mobilize online campaigns to protest increases in fuel prices and taxes during the coverage period (see B8).
- A government-mandated reregistration of SIM cards, which requires subscribers to link their SIM cards to their biometric identification card, commenced in October 2021. The government extended the deadline for individuals to reregister their SIM cards to July 2022 after approximately 7.5 million Ghanaians were unable to obtain the necessary identity card (see C4).

A Obstacles to Access

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections? 3 / 6

Steady improvement in internet infrastructure has produced gains in internet access and quality in Ghana. The country's internet penetration rate had reached 53 percent as of January 2022, according to DataReportal's *Digital in 2022* report.¹ According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), internet penetration stood at 58 percent in 2020, the most recent available data.²

Internet users in Ghana accessed average download and upload speeds of 12.46 megabits per second (Mbps) and 9.13 Mbps respectively, according to data from Broadband Checker.³ High-speed mobile internet is generally only accessible in cities.⁴

The ICT Policy for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD), the blueprint for digital transformation adopted in 2004, greatly improved internet access in the country. Through Google's CSquared project, more than 840 kilometers of fiber-optic cable have been laid in Accra, Tema, and Kumasi, three cities that account for half of Ghana's population.⁵

Infrastructure-related internet disruptions are uncommon in Ghana. However, loadshedding—planned blackouts—has interrupted internet access for some residents.⁶

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain 1 / segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons? 3

High prices for internet services and excessive taxes impede access to the internet for large segments of the population. Data prices also determine what platforms people can access. For example, some telecommunications companies offer social media bundles that are relatively cheaper than other internet packages. According to the 2022 edition of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Inclusive Internet Index, the cost of 1 gigabyte (GB) of mobile data stood between 0.6 and 3 percent of monthly gross national income (GNI) per capita in Ghana, equivalent to a range of about \$2 to \$6.⁷

In September 2020, the government lowered the Communications Service Tax, a consumer tax on telecommunications services, from 9 percent to 5 percent to mitigate the economic effects of COVID-19. During the previous coverage period, effective October 2019, the tax was increased from 6 percent to 9 percent. The increased tax was criticized for creating an additional barrier to internet access.⁸ Officials have also indicated that the government may consider a tax of over-the-top (OTT) digital services.⁹

Rural areas in Ghana tend to lack internet infrastructure. The Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications, which is funded by licensed service providers, seeks to address the urban-rural digital divide in internet access.¹⁰

Ghanaian women are 5.8 percent less likely than men to have access to the internet, according to an October 2020 report by the World Wide Web Foundation. Gender gaps are particularly pronounced for faster, stable, and regularly accessible services and in rural areas.¹¹

A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for 5 / the purposes of restricting connectivity? 6

There are no recorded restrictions on connectivity in Ghana, though the state's partial control of internet infrastructure may facilitate such restrictions.

The National Information Technology Agency (NITA) operates a fiber-optic network that it leases out to internet service providers (ISPs).¹² Major ISPs also maintain their own fiber-optic and satellite networks.¹³ Though the Ghanaian government historically operated an internet exchange point (IXP), Ghana's primary IXP is now operated by a nonprofit association of ISPs.¹⁴

Section 99 of the Electronic Communications Act (ECA), which gives the president broad powers over providers during a state of emergency, may provide the legal authority to restrict the internet.¹⁵

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service 4 / providers? 6

While Ghana's licensing requirements do not place extensive barriers to entry, MTN's dominance in the mobile services market and Vodafone's dominance over fixed-line services may limit competition. The government owns a 30 percent stake in Vodafone Ghana.¹⁶

In April 2021, the government acquired full ownership of AirtelTigo after Airtel and Millcom—AirtelTigo's parent companies—announced an exit from the Ghanaian market. After acquiring full ownership, the government announced it would temporarily operate the assets of the communications company, which served 5.1 million subscribers at the time of the sale.¹⁷

According to National Communications Authority (NCA) data from March 2021, MTN holds 68.5 percent of the mobile data market, followed by AirtelTigo with 16.7 percent, Vodafone with 13.1 percent, and Glo Mobile with 1.7 percent. Of the fixed-line market, Vodafone controls 73.9 percent, MTN controls 25.3 percent, and AirtelTigo holds 0.8 percent.[18](#)

In June 2020, the NCA announced that it had designated MTN's Ghana entity a "significant market power" and would take measures aimed at reducing MTN's share of the mobile market.[19](#) MTN filed a complaint against the designation, which was rejected by the High Court in Accra. MTN initially appealed to the Supreme Court, but withdrew the case in October 2020, citing progress in discussions with the NCA and the Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation.[20](#)

In January 2022, MTN announced that the NCA had directed the company to increase its data costs in order to enhance competition among telecommunications companies. The new plans significantly reduced the number of gigabytes individuals receive when they purchase a data package.[21](#)

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail 1 / to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner? 4

The National Communications Authority Act, 1996 established the NCA as the spectrum allocation and communication industry regulatory body. [22](#) The NCA also enforces laws that regulate the internet industry, such as the ECA[23](#) and the Electronic Transactions Act. [24](#)

The president appoints the NCA's governing board, the director general, deputy directors general, the secretary, and all other authority staff, though the appointment process is generally regarded as transparent. The NCA is required to comply with written directives from the minister of communications and digitalization.[25](#)

While appointments to NCA posts are transparent, the NCA is not considered independent in its operation. For instance, the NCA regularly closes radio stations for unauthorized broadcasting activities, but appears to target pro-opposition radio stations disproportionately.[26](#) NCA activities rarely relate to managing the internet in Ghana.

In February 2022, the governing board of the Cyber Security Authority (CSA) was inaugurated to oversee the activities of the CSA.[27](#) All members of the governing board of the CSA are appointed by the President. The CSA was established in October 2021 by the Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038).[28](#) The CSA is charged with regulating cybersecurity activities in the country, including licensing cybersecurity providers that it deems "of the public interest," raising concerns that the cybersecurity licensing process will be politicized or subject to favoritism.[29](#)

No obstacles are placed in the way of service providers and other internet-related organizations can establish self-regulatory mechanisms. There is indeed a self-regulatory organization for telecommunications companies, the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, which also operates as an advocacy group.[30](#)

B Limits on Content

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet 6 / content, particularly material that is protected by international human rights 6 standards?

The government does not force content providers to block or filter online content that would be considered protected speech under international human rights law. The government also does not block or filter circumvention tools.

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force 3 / publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content, particularly material 4 that is protected by international human rights standards?

Government officials rarely force content hosts or online outlets to delete content. The last known instance of a forced takedown was in June 2019. Content hosts are not liable for their users' activity under Ghanaian law.

In February 2021, solicitors for the Judicial Service issued a letter to media houses, requesting that certain platforms remove content deemed offensive to Supreme Court judges. The letter noted that the solicitors would "take appropriate action" if the media houses did not comply.[31](#) The directive was resisted by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and the Ghana Journalists Association

(GJA).³² In March 2021, Chief Justice Kwasi Anin-Yeboah made conciliatory statements regarding the issue, acknowledging the media's right to criticize the judiciary.³³ There are no known cases where outlets removed content in response to the letter.

Facebook, Google, and Twitter reported no requests for content removal from the Ghanaian government between January and December 2021.³⁴

The Electronic Transactions Act (ETA), 2008 safeguards service providers from liability for illegal user content, as long as the service provider does not know that the content is illegal and removes it once notified.³⁵

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process? 2 / 4

Online content restrictions are rare in Ghana, though legal processes for blocking and content removal do not establish clear rules for transparency and appeals. The last known case in which online content was removed at the request of a government official, in June 2019, was politicized, lacked transparency, and was disproportionate (see B2).

The ETA requires service providers to remove illegal content once notified. The act does not include provisions on user notice or avenues of appeal. Intermediaries can be held liable for "wrongful" removals of content.³⁶ The Cybersecurity Act, 2020 provides broad authority for the CSA to block or filter online content on receipt of a court order. The law also places penalties on service providers that fail to comply with a blocking or filtering order, which may include up to five years' imprisonment.³⁷ Section 99 of the ECA, which gives the president broad powers over service providers during a state of emergency, may also provide legal authority for blocking and filtering.³⁸

Under the proposed Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021 (see C2), website and ISP owners would be held liable for hosting any content related to or promoting LGBT+ rights unless they could prove they exercised reasonable diligence to prevent users from uploading this content.³⁹

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship? 3 / 4

Ghanaian internet users generally express themselves freely online, though some people engage in self-censorship when discussing certain sensitive issues. Media professionals report a growing sense of intimidation and a growing culture of intolerance for dissenting views on social media.

Some Ghanaian internet users may avoid expressing opinions online for fear of being attacked by trolls or supporters of powerful political figures.⁴⁰ Users avoid discussion of subjects that are likely to lead to retribution in the form of public outrage, as online harassment is increasingly common, particularly for women (see C7).

Abuses against journalists by security forces, political partisans, and the general public have driven some reporters to be wary of their digital footprints.⁴¹ Some internet users, particularly journalists and activists, prefer to remain anonymous on social media to prevent offline confrontations. In some cases, Ghanaian journalists are not able to publicly express themselves because of politicized conditions set by the owners of their media outlet.⁴²

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest? 2 / 4

Online media outlets, and the Ghanaian media industry more generally, are manipulated by political parties and government officials through bribery, informal arrangements, and paid social media commentators.

Journalists are often offered money for "transportation" for attending an event and providing coverage, under a practice known as *solli*. As a practice, *solli* undermines objectivity and influences news coverage; in some cases, the *solli* offered is sufficiently large to influence how a journalist covers a story, even sometimes serving to discourage journalists from publishing certain stories.⁴³

A number of online journalists, bloggers, and website owners have indicated that government officials or other actors attempt to bribe them or use close economic ties with service providers to influence the content they produce.⁴⁴ Political parties also seek to shape public perception by recruiting senior journalists to produce favorable coverage through their networks.⁴⁵ Public officials, including the president, are commonly understood to have close relationships with certain journalists who provide favorable coverage.

Government officials, political parties, and other actors surreptitiously employ individuals or automated systems to artificially amplify political narratives or smear campaigns on social media. Political parties regularly recruit social media commentators to drive conversations online, particularly following the 2016 elections. The ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) reportedly pays over 700 social media commentators as of 2019.[46](#)

Several websites that impersonated trusted news sites and fact-checkers were created ahead of the December 2020 elections. The mock websites, which included clones of the state-owned newspaper *Daily Graphic* and the MFWA's fact-checking website,[47](#) reportedly posted content that exclusively targeted the NPP, raising suspicions about the potential involvement of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC).[48](#)

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users' ability to 3 / publish content online? 3

There are no formal constraints that limit the viability of online media outlets or service providers. The media landscape generally favors print and television media, including state media, which collect the bulk of advertising revenues in Ghana.[49](#) Online media outlets tend to rely on monetization of their websites rather than advertising revenue.

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity and reliability? 3 / 4

Generally, people are able to access a range of local, regional and international news sources that convey independent and balanced views in many languages. While Akan- and English-language media tend to dominate in print and online, regional and community radios offer expansive linguistic diversity.[50](#)

Ghanaians using social media platforms are faced with misinformation on a daily basis. Political-party affiliates and troll armies sometimes fabricate stories to dilute topical discussions (see B5); according to AfroBarometer, 78 percent of Ghanaians identified politicians as a source of misinformation.[51](#)

Only 39 percent of Ghanaians trust social media as a source of information, compared to the 55 percent who trust public and private media outlets. This mistrust has driven support for social media regulation in the country.[52](#)

Civil society organizations, such as Penplusbytes and the MFWA, work to counter misinformation. Both organizations were active in fighting misinformation during the December 2020 elections, engaging in fact-checking efforts and forging partnerships with media outlets and government agencies.[53](#) Many media outlets are also gradually undertaking fact-checking activities aimed at countering mis- or disinformation.

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users' ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, 5 / particularly on political and social issues? 6

Conditions in Ghana are suitable for people to mobilize and campaign on political and social issues. People are generally able to mobilize without any state interference.

In May 2021, Ghanaians started using the Twitter hashtags #FixTheCountry and #FixTheCountryNow to protest an increase in fuel prices and taxes, as well as the poor healthcare system, bad road networks, and high rental rates.[54](#) Government officials and social media accounts linked to the government responded by circulating hashtags like #FixYourself, #NanalsFixingIt, and #NanalsWorking to compete with #FixTheCountry.

Later that month, the National Petroleum Authority and the Ministry of Energy adjusted a planned fuel-price increase downward, to take effect the following day.[55](#) Following this, Ghanaians protested in person and online after a court issued an injunction blocking a planned #FixTheCountry demonstration, citing COVID-19 restrictions.[56](#) Ghanaians have since continued to mobilize both online and offline under the #FixTheCountry banner, including through a large protest held in August 2021.[57](#)

Political parties adjusted their campaigning methods ahead of the December 2020 elections due to COVID-19-related restrictions. The two main political parties, the NPP and the NDC, mobilized supporters over social media.[58](#) Both political parties also employed social media communication officers who mostly engaged in propaganda (see B5).

C Violations of User Rights

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence? 4 / 6

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, access to information, a free and independent media, and an unrestrained media environment.[59](#)

In March 2019, Parliament passed the Right to Information (RTI) Bill after two decades of consistent and persistent advocacy by RTI campaigners, anticorruption advocates, the media, and other key stakeholders. [60](#) Though the legislation took effect in 2020, the RTI coalition reported that few government agencies were compliant with the law as of that September.[61](#)

The judiciary is considered generally independent and impartial. The courts have issued some excessive fines against media companies for defamation in the past,[62](#) but such rulings are not perceived to be a common practice or indicative of bias against the press. In October 2015, 12 High Court judges and 22 lower court judges were implicated in a bribery scandal,[63](#) causing a widespread loss of trust in the judiciary.

Impunity for crimes against journalists in Ghana is common. Many attacks against journalists (see C7) have not been investigated or go unpunished, including attacks against those who work in traditional media platforms, online journalists, bloggers, and other digital content providers who may not classify themselves as journalists or bloggers.[64](#)

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? 2 / 4

Internet users in Ghana can face criminal penalties for online content that is deemed to be false, which is broadly defined under existing law.

In June 2021, members of Parliament proposed the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021. If this legislation is passed, individuals who use internet services to produce or share materials advocating or supporting LGBT+ activities would face criminal penalties, including prison sentences of up to 10 years.[65](#) As of May 2022, the proposed law was still being considered by Parliament.

Under Sections 74, 75, and 76 of the ECA, an individual can be jailed for “false and misleading” content online. The law defines “false or misleading” content as that which is sent by a person who “did not take reasonable steps to find out whether the communication was false, misleading, reckless or fraudulent.” Internet users who share such content can receive a fine of up to 12,000 cedi (about \$1,700) and up to 3 years’ imprisonment, while those whose content is deemed a false distress signal or likely to endanger the safety of a person or vehicle face a fine of 36,000 cedi (\$5,100) and up to 5 years’ imprisonment.[66](#) Internet users have also been prosecuted for their online activities under Section 208 of the Criminal Offences Act, 1960, which criminalizes the publication of statements “likely to cause fear and alarm to the public or to disturb the public peace” when published by a person “knowing or having reason to believe that the statement, rumour or report is false.”[67](#)

The Cybersecurity Act, 2020 also criminalizes the use of electronic platforms for the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images and sexual extortion, with penalties of 1 to 3 years’ imprisonment for the former charge and 10 to 25 years for the latter.[68](#)

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities, particularly those that are protected under international human rights standards? 3 / 6

Though cases are generally rare, some individuals were charged with false publication during the coverage period, primarily online journalists.

In May 2022, Noah Dammeh, the deputy station coordinator of Radio Ada, was arrested after uploading a post on Facebook accusing the head of a mining company of perpetuating human rights abuses against local residents.[69](#) Dammeh was released with no charge four hours after his arrest.[70](#)

In February 2022, Oheneba Boamah Bennie, a journalist with broadcaster Power FM, was sentenced to 14 days in prison and fined 3,000 cedi (about \$400) for a December 2020 Facebook post in which he accused President Akufo-Addo of meeting with Supreme Court judges before they ruled on the 2020 election petition.[71](#) Officials charged Bennie with gross disrespect of the judiciary, a constitutional violation.[72](#)

Mensah Thompson, executive director of the Alliance of Social Equity and Public Accountability (ASEPA) was also arrested in February 2022, and accused of publishing false news after making a Facebook post in which he alleged that President Akufo-Addo and his family had used the presidential jet to travel to the United Kingdom (UK) to go shopping in December 2021. He was released on bail shortly after his arrest.[73](#)

The same month, Kwabena Bobbie Ansah, a journalist with Accra FM, was arrested after he uploaded a video on social media in which he allegedly accused both the First Lady and the vice president's wife of fraudulently acquiring state land for the First Lady's nonprofit organization. He was released on bail shortly after his arrest.[74](#)

Also in February 2022, Oliver Barker-Vormawor, a #FixTheCountry protest convenor, was arrested upon his return to Ghana; he was charged with treason under the Criminal Offences Act based on a Facebook post in which he threatened to conduct a coup if a tax on electronic payments was passed.[75](#) He was released on bail of 2 million cedi (\$262,600) in March 2022.[76](#) The case remained ongoing as of June 2022.[77](#)

In December 2021, blogger Joseph Dumolga was arrested for making Facebook posts in which he alleged that the organizers of a beauty pageant had not honored their promises to winners. After the organizers filed a complaint to the police, he was charged with "breaching of the peace" under the Criminal and Other Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29). Dumolga was granted bail and the complaints were withdrawn after he took down the posts and apologized to the pageant organizers.[78](#)

In October 2021, Facebook influencer Francis Kennedy Ocloo was fined 100,000 cedi (about \$13,000) for defamation after he was found guilty of making defamatory posts on Facebook against another Facebook user, Efua Sintim. Although the posts, made in May 2017, did not name Sintim, the court said they contained enough information to identify Sintim as the subject. The court also ordered Ocloo to delete the posts in question and publish an unqualified apology every day for 30 days on his Facebook account. [79](#)

In May 2021, national security officials arrested journalist and Citi FM reporter Caleb Kudah, for "unauthorized" filming on the premises of the Ministry of National Security. The officers assaulted Kudah and confiscated his phone, deleting photos he had taken of abandoned vehicles on the premises. Armed officers also arrested Kudah's colleague, Zoe Abu-Baidoo, who had received photographs taken by Kudah. Both journalists were released after several hours of interrogation.[80](#)

In April 2021, David Tamakloe, editor in chief of news site Whatsup News, was arrested for alleged extortion and publication of false news under the Criminal Offences Act, 1960. Tamakloe was released on bail on April 2, and reported to the police again 4 days later for a meeting in which police asked for access to his electronic devices.[81](#) According to Tamakloe, the arrest was intended to intimidate him and prevent him from investigating a scandal involving a businesswoman married to a senior police officer.[82](#) The status of his case is unknown as of March 2022.

In May 2020, social media user Bless Amedegbe was arrested over a video he published on YouTube and WhatsApp in April of that year. In the video, Amedegbe reportedly urged people to defy a COVID-19 lockdown order, destroy President Akufo-Addo's residence, and attack police officers enforcing the lockdown. He was charged with false communication under the ECA, as well as assault on a public officer. In August 2020, he received a bail of 100,000 cedi (\$17,200), with two sureties.[83](#) The status of his case is unknown as of August 2022.

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? 2 / 4

Anonymous and encrypted communications in Ghana are hampered by legal requirements that mandate subscribers to link SIM cards with national identity documents and service providers to decrypt information when ordered by investigators. The government expanded such authorities during the coverage period, and a provision of the Cybersecurity Act may require providers of encryption technology to register with the government.

Under the SIM Registration Regulations, Ghanaians must register SIM cards with their name, address, and proof of identity in order to use the card in a mobile phone, computer, or other device.[84](#) The ECA mandates all telecommunications operators keep the data of their subscribers for disclosure to the NCA.[85](#)

In May 2021, the government announced plans for the mandatory reregistration of SIM cards, requiring subscribers to link their SIM cards to the Ghana Card, the country's biometric identity card. The reregistration commenced in October 2021, and was originally set to end in March 2022, but was later extended to July 31, 2022, because an estimated 7.5 million Ghanaians were unable to obtain a Ghana Card, which is needed to reregister. In November 2021, a lawyer filed an application at the

High Court challenging the mandatory reregistration, citing data privacy concerns.⁸⁶ He later withdrew the lawsuit after the court said it could not stop the reregistration campaign while his lawsuit was pending.⁸⁷

Officials previously conducted a reregistration process between January and June 2020. Communications Minister Ursula Owusu-Ekuful attributed that process to “the lack of an acceptable, fake proof, identification card and nonexistence of verification by a national database to ensure the traceability of the individual who registered the SIM card.”⁸⁸ It is unclear whether reregistration activities were conducted at scale, though telecommunications companies may have requested that subscribers confirm their SIM registration status voluntarily.⁸⁹ In 2012, the NCA announced that over 5.5 million national identity cards used to register SIM cards were not valid.⁹⁰

The Cybersecurity Act, 2020, passed in December 2020, expands the government’s legal authority to control the provision of encryption technology. Section 49 requires a license issued by the CSA to provide cybersecurity services, as well as a fee to be determined by the authority. This section likely covers the provision of encryption technology. Under Section 76, a high court may compel a network operator to acquire tools and equipment necessary to decrypt information of a subscriber who is being investigated, at its own expense.⁹¹

Under Section 99(3) of the Electronic Transactions Act, 2008, security forces with a court warrant may require a telecommunications operator to provide necessary information and access to facilitate the decryption of customer data in connection with the investigation of an offense. Such a court order may apply when a third party has applied encryption and the telecommunications provider has the capacity to decrypt the data.⁹²

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users’ right to privacy? 3 / 6

While the constitution protects privacy, several laws permit the president and law enforcement officers to order communications interception and monitoring, sometimes without a court order (see C6). Security forces have reportedly purchased commercial surveillance technology. Though no cases of security forces monitoring private communications have been publicly reported, civil society organizations and journalists generally suspect the government has the capacity to do so.

Article 18 of the constitution safeguards Ghanaians from interference with privacy, including of correspondence and communication. This protection is excepted when the interference is in accordance with law and is necessary for public safety, economic well-being, protection of health or morals, prevention of crime, and protection of other people’s rights and freedoms.⁹³

In July 2019, Ghana Business News reported that in 2016, the government purchased the Pegasus spyware suite, developed by the Israeli company NSO Group. The NCA purchased access at the request of security officials, but only acquired the specialized equipment on which to run Pegasus—according to court documents, the NSO Group refused to deliver the software due to payment issues.⁹⁴ Several officials, including the former NCA director general, the NCA board chair, and a former national security coordinator, received corruption-related prison sentences over the payment issue.⁹⁵

In July 2020, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that then-Criminal Investigations Department (CID) director Maame Yaa Tiwaa Addo-Danquah disclosed that Ghanaian security forces have access to Cellebrite, a tool used to decrypt encrypted devices. The US and UK governments, along with Interpol, had provided the necessary equipment as well as training support.⁹⁶

In 2018, it was made known that the government was pursuing a contract with KelniGVG to establish a platform that would facilitate real-time physical access to the network nodes of providers MTN, Vodafone, and AirtelTigo, potentially breaching the privacy guarantees of Article 12 of the constitution. The common platform may also violate Section 73 of the ECA and Section 7 of the Communications Service Tax (Amendment) Act, 2013.⁹⁷ The KelniGVG platform was used to facilitate the collection of subscriber information from telecommunications providers under Executive Instrument 63; in August 2021, a court ruled that the data collection violated subscribers’ right to privacy and required KelniGVG to pay damages to the plaintiff in the lawsuit (see C6).⁹⁸

In 2015, the NCA contracted Afriwave Telecom Ghana to provide a clearinghouse for inbound and outbound communications. The MFWA raised concerns that the centralized communications infrastructure might facilitate communications surveillance or mass censorship.⁹⁹

The Cybersecurity Act, 2020, passed in December 2020, expands the government’s legal authority to conduct surveillance. Section 71 authorizes security officers to collect and record communications metadata, either stored or in real time, on receipt of a warrant; Section 73 provides similar authority for the content of communications. Though the law outlines oversight and data minimization provisions, there is no requirement to inform the person being surveilled. Section 69 permits law

enforcement agents to collect subscriber data from a telecommunications provider with a court order (see C6). Data collected and intercepted under these authorities are subject to oversight by inspectors appointed by the president, raising concerns about independence.[100](#)

C6 0-6 pts

Does monitoring and collection of user data by service providers and other technology 3 / companies infringe on users' right to privacy? 6

Ghanaians' personal data are protected under a comprehensive data protection framework, but security forces enjoy broad legal authority to obtain user data from telecommunications companies, including through communications interception.

In July 2021, the Accra High Court ruled that an executive instrument compelling telecommunications providers to give authorities subscriber data violated Ghanaians' right to privacy. Executive Instrument 63, which the president signed in March 2020 under the authority of Section 100 of the ECA, tasked the NCA with collecting the information, including unique mobile identifiers, to aid contact-tracing efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collection was facilitated by an intermediary platform created by KelniGVG (see C5). The court directed the government to stop collecting the data and delete any information collected under the executive instrument. The NCA, Vodafone, and KelniGVG were also directed to pay damages to Francis Kwarteng Arthur, the lawyer who filed the lawsuit.[101](#)

The Data Protection Act, 2012 protects data privacy in Ghana. The legislation establishes data rights for Ghanaians, including requirements regarding consent, and applies data minimization and retention limitations to entities that process data. The law also applies special safeguards to "special personal data," defined as data that relates to race, ethnicity, tribal origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, health information, DNA, sexual orientation, and criminal history. The law's requirements extend to entities that collect or process data in Ghana, and to those collecting or processing data that originates from Ghana.[102](#)

The Data Protection Act also established the Data Protection Commission (DPC), which regulates the processing of personal information. All companies and organizations that process data are required to register with the DPC, which maintains a register of entities that are qualified as data processors under the law.[103](#)

The Cybersecurity Act, 2020 greatly expands government access to data collected by telecommunications service providers. Section 76 empowers the CSA to compel a service provider to install interception technology, in order to facilitate the government's surveillance powers under the law (see C4 and C5). Section 77 mandates that service providers retain subscriber information for at least six years, and metadata and the content of communications for one year. Law enforcement officials can seek a court order to extend either period.[104](#)

Under Section 100 of the ECA, the president may, by executive instrument, require operators or providers of electronic communications networks or services to intercept communications to aid law enforcement or national security. The law also mandates all telecommunications operators to keep the data of their subscribers for disclosure to the NCA.[105](#)

According to the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2008, security forces may apply for a court order to require a communications service provider to intercept customer communications for the purpose of obtaining evidence of commission of an offense under the legislation.[106](#)

During the December 2020 elections, many people received text messages or phone calls from the leading political parties, raising concerns about the government or other individuals having access to user data from telecommunications companies. The telecommunications companies denied responsibility for those messages.[107](#)

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state 3 / authorities or any other actor in relation to their online activities? 5

Online harassment is common in Ghana, particularly for women, journalists, and LGBT+ people. In some cases, internet users experience offline intimidation or physical violence, as do journalists reporting on government officials or LGBT+ individuals targeted in discriminatory attacks.

In April 2022, Oliver Barker-Vormawor, an activist and #FixTheCountry protest convenor, accused the police of torturing him while he was detained on charges of treason for allegedly threatening to conduct a coup in Facebook posts (see C3). The deputy attorney general dismissed Barker-Vormawor's allegations as baseless.[108](#)

In February 2022, Eric Nana Gyetuah, a producer for Connect FM's morning program, which airs on Facebook, was assaulted by five police officers after he refused to stop taking photographs of an arrest and declined to hand his phone over to the police. After the assault, the police charged

In June 2021, Ibrahim Mohammed, an activist involved with the #FixTheCountry movement, died after he was attacked by a mob outside his house. He had been sharing videos on social media about various issues, including the poor healthcare system in his community.¹¹⁰ Though three people face charges related to his murder, the case has been postponed multiple times, and remains stalled as of March 2022.¹¹¹

In recent years, Ghanaian journalists have faced online harassment for their work, particularly after reporting on government officials or other powerful people. For instance, journalist Edward Adeti received threats in February 2020 potentially related to his reporting on an investigation into a prosecutor accepting bribes, which he had released on YouTube.¹¹² The threats became so severe that Adeti had to relocate from his home in Northern Region to the Greater Accra Region, after it became apparent that he and other members of his family were being followed.¹¹³ The January 2019 murder of Ahmed Hussein-Suale, a member of the Tiger Eye PI investigative journalism organization, further showed how online threats sometimes precede offline harms.¹¹⁴

Many women report experiencing sexual harassment, stalking, and the nonconsensual sharing of their intimate images online, according to a 2018 MFWA study.¹¹⁵ Female journalists report experiencing frequent sexual harassment and abuse online, often from trolls and political party supporters.¹¹⁶

LGBT+ people in Ghana experience harassment and intimidation both online and offline, and are also targeted with physical violence on the basis of their identity.¹¹⁷ A January 2018 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report documented several cases in which men were severely beaten after being solicited into meeting other men over social media or dating apps.¹¹⁸

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users 3 / subject to widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack? 3

Government and major financial entities experience cyberattacks, motivating the passage of a cybersecurity law in December 2020. No attacks on media organizations, civil society organizations, or government critics were reported during the coverage period.

In February 2022, the Ghana Education Service's website for school selection placements was reportedly hacked. The hackers allegedly gained access to parent phone numbers and student birthdays.¹¹⁹

In January 2022, irrelevant content was reportedly uploaded to the website for the presidency. It was unclear if this was caused by a technical issue or if the website had been hacked.¹²⁰

In July 2020, Universal Bank in Accra was hacked, with the perpetrators succeeding in transferring about 46 million cedi (\$7.9 million).¹²¹ In June 2019, US government officials disclosed that hackers had breached 18 Ghanaian institutions, including public sector actors, financial institutions, and telecommunications providers, and exfiltrated sensitive information, including passwords.¹²²

The Cybersecurity Act, 2020 designated the National Cyber Security Center as the CSA, which is empowered to prevent and protect against cyberattacks. The CSA's responsibilities include increasing the government's cybersecurity capacity, threat monitoring, and technical support for law enforcement activities. In 2019, the National Cyber Security Center launched a system for citizens to report suspected and identified cybercrime and cybersecurity incidents.¹²³

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(reporting period June 2021 -
May 2022)

Country:

Ghana

Source:

[Freedom House](#)

Original link:

[https://freedomhouse.org/cou
ntry/ghana/freedom-net/2022](https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2022)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

18 October 2022

Document ID:

2081797

Austrian Red Cross
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Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

