



Ghana

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↑↑

Capital: Accra

Type of Government: Constitutional Democracy

Head of Government: President John Agyekum Kufuor (since 7 January 2001)

Foreign Minister: Hackman Owusu-Agyeman

Population: 19,894,014

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 129

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ghana's record of support for democracy abroad in the last ten years has shifted from fair to **good** as the country itself has undergone a transition to democratic rule within this same period.

A key factor influencing Ghana's record is the fact that former President Jerry Rawlings began his 19-year period of leadership (1981-2000) as a military ruler who led a coup d'etat against an elected government. Therefore, he was less inclined to condemn other military dictatorships or military coups outright. His comments and speeches often contained mixed messages about the value of democracy,¹ and he regularly showed sympathy for regimes perceived to be under siege from Western pressure. However, his personal experience made him a good candidate to negotiate with other coup-makers and rebels, which helped bring about agreements for democratic reforms in neighboring countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone.

More recently, President Kufuor has had a stronger platform from which to support democracy around the world. He belongs to a political party that has a long tradition of espousing the ideals of constitutionality, and he won power in 2000 through elections that were universally acclaimed as being free and fair. Ghana is now viewed as a model democratic transition, and President Kufuor is seen as a keen advocate of democracy on the continent. President Kufuor was one of the few African leaders to openly condemn the manipulation of the recent elections in Zimbabwe. However, he has, in several instances, chosen domestic strategic interests over the promotion of democracy abroad. In his short time as president, he has fostered close cooperation with authoritarian leaders in the sub-region including Burkina Faso's Blaise Campoare and Togo's Nyasimbge Eyadema. Nevertheless the trend shows that Ghana has steadily improved its support for democracy abroad since Kufuor took over from Jerry Rawlings two years ago.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Ghana's foreign relations is structured around three major goals: attracting development assistance and investment capital, maintaining friendly ties with neighbors, and playing an active and constructive role in international and regional fora by engaging in peacekeeping and election monitoring missions. These goals reflect pragmatism dictated by poor economic conditions and the need to compete globally for development assistance.

In the early 1980s, for instance, Ghana agreed to embark on IMF / World Bank sponsored program of economic and political liberalization in order to attract development aid and foreign investment. It has also maintained good relations with Nigeria (from whom Ghana receives crude oil at concessionary prices) and Cote d'Ivoire (which provides electrical energy supplements when needed) irrespective of the type of leadership governing those states. Ghana is cognizant of its weak capacity for unilateral action in the international arena and hence augments its power by developing close ties (usually at the presidential level) with more powerful states. Towards this goal, President Rawlings traveled extensively to several Western



capitals and hosted visits by President Clinton, Queen Elizabeth II and many other dignitaries. Since President Kufour came to power in 2001 he has also enjoyed a special relationship with the West.

Ghana's limited capacity for unilateral action also has led it to pursue many foreign policy activities through multilateral channels such as the United Nations, the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS). Membership in these organizations provide Ghana with a platform for protecting some of its interests as well as to establish itself as a leader on several issues of concern to the African continent. For example, through the UN and ECOWAS, Ghana has been able to engage in numerous peacekeeping missions, which earns it international respect as a partner for global stability and a moral leader in African affairs. But Ghana's involvement in international peacekeeping functions is sometimes also driven more by a desire to raise funds for its military than peace and security concerns. Such pragmatism allows Ghana to influence events in neighboring African countries sometimes to an extent that belies her small size and resources.

Ghana's other foreign relations "assets" include its status as a "role model" and the prominent role several Ghanaian nationals play in the international system. Ghana's "role model" status arises out of the country's position as the first African state south of the Sahara to gain independence from colonial rule and the dynamic leadership of its first president, Kwame Nkrumah, in the Pan-Africanist movement. The decision to implement World Bank sponsored economic reform programs two decades ago and recent democratic reforms have also reinforced the "role model" image and somewhat established Ghana as a leader of the movement for political change and rejuvenation of the African continent. The recent electoral victory of the opposition National Patriotic Party (NPP) and former President Jerry Rawlings' decision to peacefully leave office after his constitutionally prescribed term limit, for instance, were seen as symbolic lessons for other African leaders.

The leadership positions occupied by Ghanaian nationals in various multilateral institutions also enhance the country's profile in the international system. The current heads of the UN (Kofi Annan), ECOWAS (Ibn Chambas) and the Economic Commission for Africa (K.Y. Amoako) are Ghanaians. The country takes credit for the works of these and others nationals in the field of

international diplomacy and often supports their work by launching mediation sessions to bring peace to war-torn countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Cote d'Ivoire and also by hosting conferences that enhance the prospects for democracy and development in Africa.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Ghana's record of response to the overthrow of democratically-elected governments has been mixed. For most of the Rawlings years, Ghana was less willing to unilaterally condemn military takeovers but nevertheless worked through regional institutions to promote reconciliation and a return to constitutional rule.

In the case of the April 1999 coup in Niger, for instance, the Ghanaian government did not strongly condemn the overthrow of the democratically-elected government of Ibrahim Bare Mainassara. This was partly because Jerry Rawlings (himself a three-time coup maker whose recent stint in office began with the overthrow of democratically-elected government of President Hilla Limann)², was not in a strong moral position to condemn the overthrow of democratically-elected regimes elsewhere. Another reason for the poor response to the Niger coup is the fact that Ghana has neither strategic interests in nor special ties to the country. Hence Jerry Rawlings did not invest any significant resources into cultivating a friendship with its leadership as he did with Presidents Konan Bedie of neighboring Cote d'Ivoire and Sani Abacha of Nigeria (Ghana's principal ally in West Africa).

Personal friendships were an important aspect of foreign relations under Rawlings. In the case of the Cote d'Ivoire coup (1999) for instance, ousted President Bedie, a personal friend of Mr. Rawlings, paid a visit to Ghana to enlist the support for his return to power. The Rawlings government condemned the coup and declared that the Ivorian junta would not enjoy any support from Ghana. The government, however, refrained from applying any unilateral measures to force the coup leader, General Robert Guei, out of office and instead limited its involvement to an ECOWAS mediation plan that eventually persuaded General Guei to hold elections in October 2000. Rawlings supported the



return of Bedie (who was the guest of honor at Ghana's 40th independence anniversary in 1997) in spite of the fact that he was widely believed to have rigged the October 1995 elections that confirmed him in power.

Since becoming President, Kufour has also fostered a close relationship with neighboring leaders such as Bedie's successor, Laurent Gbagbo. The Kufour regime therefore responded to the recent coup attempt against Mr. Gbagbo (September 2002) with an immediate and strong condemnation of the coup plotters. Ghana has since hosted an ECOWAS summit on the reconciliation process in Cote d'Ivoire and has promised to send troops as part of any ECOWAS peacekeeping presence.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Ghana has a mixed record on response to the manipulation of electoral processes abroad. Under Rawlings, Ghana failed to openly condemn the manipulation of electoral processes abroad. Rawlings' government had itself been accused of rigging elections in 1992, and was therefore not inclined to point a finger at anyone else. Accordingly, the Rawlings regime failed to condemn the annulment of the 1993 elections in Nigeria. Rawlings may also have shied away from condemning Nigeria (an important trading partner and regional ally), because of fear of reprisals from Abuja. Nigeria supplies Ghana with oil on favorable terms and there is a large Ghanaian immigrant population living in Nigeria. The deportation of approximately one million Ghanaian immigrants from Nigeria in the mid-eighties was the cause of severe instability in the Ghanaian economy. Therefore the Ghanaian government has tried to maintain a policy of friendly relations with whichever government is in power in Nigeria regardless of their democratic or human rights record.

In the Cote d'Ivoire case, President Bedie was perceived by several observers to have manipulated the elections that confirmed him as President in 1995. The Ghana government's silence may have been due to the personal friendship between Mr. Bedie and Mr. Rawlings as well as Ghana's strategic and economic relationship with Cote d'Ivoire.

In a clear departure from Rawlings, John Kufour's administration has openly condemned attempts by foreign governments to manipulate electoral processes since it came to power in 2001.

The government has also dispatched observers to join election-monitoring missions in several countries. In Zimbabwe's March 2002 elections, for instance, Ghana strongly defended the principle of free and fair elections and dispatched official election monitors to the country. The monitors found the elections not to be transparent and noted the absence of an independent Electoral Commission in Zimbabwe. President Kufour made clear his disapproval of Mr. Mugabe's attempts to hold on to power through the manipulation of the vote. He fully backed Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth, and decried treason charges leveled against the main opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Ghana's record of support for democracy internationally in the past decade has been good especially under the Kufour administration. Despite its limited resources, Ghana has been an active participant in democracy promotion abroad. It has mediated disputes in other countries, provided technical assistance and participated in election-monitoring and peacekeeping. Ghanaian leaders have participated in international fora and been vocal in publicly condemning actions that subvert the democratic process. President Kufour in particular, has been a strong advocate for democracy, frequently stressing the importance of the rule of law and respect for human rights. In a keynote address at the AU summit in Zambia this year he stated that, 'The African Union must reflect the commitment of its member states to democracy, the rule of law and the protection and promotion of human rights...We also believe that unconstitutional means of changing governments on the continent is an anachronism, and should not be tolerated in an era of mutual respect amongst us as states, governments and peoples.'

Ghana under Kufour has also been at the forefront of the New Partnership for African Development (Nepad) and a strong advocate for the peer review mechanism that emphasizes good governance as criteria for membership.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

African leaders have traditionally shown solidarity with each other, and with other third world leaders regardless of differences in their styles of government or their human rights records.



Ghana has been no exception. As stated earlier, Ghana believes that maintaining good relations with key states in the West Africa region is in its strategic interest. The more strategically relevant a country is, the less likely the government will be to condemn the undemocratic tendencies of its leaders.

Jerry Rawlings' populism drew him to support most left-wing regimes when he ruled Ghana as a dictator from 1981 to 1992. His ties with entrenched dictators like Muammar Qaddafi and Fidel Castro became weaker after he transformed himself into a civilian President. However, strong ties with "local" dictators such as Sanni Abacha of Nigeria persisted and shaped Ghana's policies. Rawlings became a personal apologist for the Abacha regime and tried to persuade the Commonwealth against suspending Nigeria following Mr. Abacha's execution of the six Ogoni nationalists in 1995.

In 1996, Mr. Abacha was invited as the guest of honor at Mr. Rawlings' second inauguration. It was later alleged in *The Post Express*, a Nigerian newspaper, that Rawlings had accepted a fee of \$5 millions from Abacha in 1996 to help rehabilitate his international reputation. When Rawlings met with the US Special Representative on Liberia, he called for the recognition of Nigeria's leading role in resolving the

Liberian conflict. "It is therefore fair that we give Nigeria due credit," he said.⁴

Since becoming president, Kufour has also encouraged links with entrenched dictators like Eyadema of Togo. To the surprise of many observers, one of his first trips abroad after coming to power was to Togo. This may have been due to the financial help and others forms of assistance that Eyadema, a long-time Rawlings adversary, is rumored to have given to Kufour's party in the run up to the December 2000 elections.

President Kufour appears committed also to maintaining some level of cooperation with Cuba's Fidel Castro, a staunch friend and role model for Rawlings. Once again, socio-economic interests may be the underlying factor. Cuban doctors have been an important presence in Ghana's health services since the early 1980s. In July 2002, Ghana's Foreign Minister Hackman Owusu-Agyemang visited Cuba to successfully negotiate an increase in the number of Cuban doctors working in Ghana. Cuba also agreed to send medical professors to Ghana's University of Development Studies at Tamale.

Clearly, when strategic interests are at stake, Ghana's leaders have chosen cooperation and friendship with entrenched dictators over criticism.

¹ For example in an interview to the German Spiegel magazine in 1997, President Rawlings rejected a suggestion that military dictatorships are the real problem in Africa, saying that they rather help to transform political ideas into reality.

² Rawlings first attempted to seize power through a coup (unsuccessfully) on 15 May, 1979. Subsequent coups brought him to power on 4 June 1979 and again on 31 December 1981.

³ The Republic of Ghana. <www.ghana.gov.gh>

⁴ *Ghana Review International* 20 May 1997.