



Ghana — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1821 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: In 1821, the British government formed the British Gold Coast colony on the territory of Ghana, after having taken over the remaining interests of other European countries. They purchased and incorporated the Danish Gold Coast in 1850 and the Dutch Gold Coast, including Fort Elmina, in 1872.¹ Ghana officially became a British Crown Colony in 1843. The territory of what constitutes today's Ghana consisted of four separate British colonial territories: Gold Coast, Ashanti, the Northern Territories, and British Togoland.² Elections were regularly held for the Legislative Council since 1925, however the Council did not have complete control over the legislation, and the voting franchise was limited to residents of urban areas meeting property requirements and the councils of chiefs. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicates an ambiguous state regarding political liberties. For the relevant regime period³, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

02/08/1951 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On 02/08/1951 universal suffrage was granted for the 1951 legislative election. It was the first election to be held in Africa under universal suffrage.⁴ On 04/29/1954, a new constitution was approved. It established an African cabinet as well as an African legislature which was chosen by direct election (as opposed to election by tribal leaders).⁵ In May 1956, Prime Minister Nkrumah and his government delivered a proposal for independence to which the British Government agreed, with the condition that a majority in favor of independence won the upcoming elections. On 07/17/1956, pre-independence general elections in the Gold Coast followed. Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) emerged with a majority of 71 of 104 seats. Consequently, the British Government agreed to grant independence.⁶ According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to V-Dem's PCLI. From 1952 to 1956, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1957, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

03/06/1957 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule, forming a dominion within the British Commonwealth with Queen Elizabeth II as the head of state. Nkrumah became the Prime Minister in a parliamentary system.⁷ Ghana adopted democratic institutions with a multiparty system, a constitution guaranteeing fundamental rights, and regular elections. While democratic institutions existed, there were early signs of authoritarian tendencies, such as the Preventive Detention Act of 1958, which allowed the government to detain individuals without trial. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED indicates that political liberties are coded as absent and V-Dem's PCLI

can be interpreted as ambiguous. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

07/01/1960 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy (as a republic): Ghana was declared a republic on this date (Lansford 2021: 626). On 04/27/1960, a referendum, which concentrated power in the presidency, as well as the first presidential elections took place. The elections were won by Nkrumah but do not fulfil the criteria of being free and fair (Pinkney 1972: 15-16, Finer 1975: 501, McLaughlin/Owusu-Ansah 1995, Brooker 1995: 103-10, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b).⁸ Subsequently, Nkrumah consolidated his power. The CPP increasingly suppressed opposition parties through legal and extralegal means (Pinkney 1972). From 1960 to 1964, the Convention People's Party (CPP) rose to power, establishing a de facto one-party dictatorship that neighboring states began to view with growing apprehension (Lansford 2021: 626). The first in a series of attempted assassinations on Nkrumah occurred at Kulugungu in August 1962. This incident led to his increased seclusion from public life and contributed to the development of a burgeoning personality cult.⁹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections during this period as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as somewhat free and fair while their CEI scores them as ambiguously or somewhat clean. Besides, political liberties are absent following LIED. V-Dem's PCLI categorizes them with an ambiguous presence. According to our own observations and classifications Ghana is a clear case of an electoral autocracy. In 1960 and 1961, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. In 1962 and 1963, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 1, between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

01/31/1964 End Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Personalist Autocracy: During this event, a constitutional referendum was conducted. The proposed amendments formally converted the country into a one-party state and expanded the authority of President Kwame Nkrumah, appointing him as president for life. The reported outcome, with an unlikely 99.91% of voters supporting the amendments, raised allegations of an "clearly rigged" referendum.¹⁰ It is somehow problematic to code a regime change in 1964 since obviously the regime led by Nkrumah did not change but transform. Nevertheless, coding as Personalist Autocracy begins on 01/31/1964 with the official referendum transforming the state legally into a one-party system, de facto into a personalist autocracy. According to our classification rule, the appointment of a president for life is a sufficient characteristic to classify a regime as personalist autocracy. In addition, there are complementary characteristics of a personalist autocracy. Such as the fact that the CPP was co-founded by Nkrumah or the cult of personality which was expressed mainly through his own ideology called Nkrumaism.¹¹ On 06/09/1965, the first parliamentary elections since 1956 took place.¹² In accordance with the 1964 referendum, the CPP was the only legal party and therefore the only party able to take part in the elections.¹³ According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1964, in 1965 executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. Furthermore, while LIED's scores political liberties still as absent, V-Dem's PCLI outcomes changed to a range which we interpret in the way that political liberties were not really present per this indicator. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For the year 1965, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1966, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

02/24/1966 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military coup led by Colonel Kotoka and Major Afrifa overthrew Nkrumah. It handed power to dismissed Major General Ankrah and

established the National Liberation Council, a group of four military and four police officers as the ruling group (Pinkney 1972: 2, 70, 121, Bebler 1973: 36-40, Brooker 1995: 111-12, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 61-62). Political parties were banned until 05/01/1969 (Krennerich 1999: 423). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. LIED classifies political liberties as absent. Following V-Dem's PCLI they were not really present until 1967 and ambiguous from 1968 onwards. Based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the years 1967 and 1968, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 1969, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

08/29/1969 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, there was a "competitive election after the military agreed to return to the barracks" (Bebler 1973: 54-55, Dowse 1975: 24, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 62).¹⁴ The Progress Party won the majority of the seats. Their leader Kofi Abrefa Busia became Prime Minister.¹⁵ Since the constitution of 1969 established a unicameral parliamentary system, there were no presidential elections. The president was supposed to be elected by an electoral college, until 08/31/1970 a provisional presidential commission exercised the presidential functions. Afterwards Edward Akufo Addo took over the presidency (Krennerich 1999: 424).¹⁶ These years are generally considered as a move towards democracy. The aim of Busia and his government was the restoration of democratic rule and economic prosperity. The failure in the latter led to the fall of Busia in particular. Attempts to silence and manage criticism were ineffective and in no means of autocratic nature. But privileges of office were nonetheless abused by parliamentarians and ministers, resulting in patronage and nepotism (LeVine 1987, Owusu 1972, Austin 1970). Between 1970 and 1971 AF, BR, GWF, LIED and MCM classify Ghana as a democracy. We classify this period as an electoral democracy on the borderline to an electoral hybrid regime), acknowledging the steps to reverse the autocratic system of Nkrumah. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this brief period, LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as somewhat free and fair but their CEI scores electoral cleanliness as ambiguous. According to LIED political liberties were still absent. However, V-Dem's PCLI classifies them as somewhat present. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For 1970-1971, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For the year 1972, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

01/13/1972 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, a military coup, orchestrated by Lieutenant Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, ousted the democratically elected President, Edward Akufo-Addo, and subsequently, assumed the role of chairman of the National Redemption Council. By 1975, this council transitioned into the Supreme Military Council, a seven-member body that included the leaders of the military services, police, border guards, and the defense chief (Bebler 1973: 56-60, Bennett 2014: 308, Lansford 2012c: 539, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 62).¹⁷ In November 1978, during a strike by junior civil servants, the regime declared a state of emergency and terminated the employment of over 1.000 public workers. Under the mounting pressure, Frederick W. K. Akuffo eventually conceded by declaring the lifting of the ban on political parties on 01/01/1979 and the organization of free elections.¹⁸ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. As classified by FH for the period until 1977, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. In 1978 a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. In addition to that, political liberties were coded as absent by LIED and can be interpreted as not really present following V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1973 to 1978, V-Dem's JCE is

interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1979, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

05/15/1979 End Military Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: After Jerry Rawlings, a flight lieutenant who led a group of junior officers attempting a coup, was sentenced to be executed, members of the armed forces sympathetic to him freed him and completed the coup.¹⁹ He established and became chairman of a 15-member Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), primarily composed of junior officers. During his 112-day rule with the AFRC, he orchestrated the execution by firing squad of eight military officers, among them Generals Kotei, Joy Amedume, Roger Felli, and Utuka. Notably, three former Ghanaian heads of state – Acheampong, Akufo, and Akwasi Afrifa – also faced the same fate. These executions were pivotal events in Ghana's history, a nation that had previously experienced limited instances of political violence.²⁰ Due to the short period of its survival this regime does not appear in the country-year dataset even if it is rather important in the context of the history of Ghana.

06/18/1979 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date parliamentary elections and the first round of the presidential election took place. On 07/09/1979 a second round of competitive presidential elections took place (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 62).²¹ Both the parliamentary and presidential elections are considered by most datasets and most researchers as free and fair and the following – short – regime period as democratic. The presidential election in 1979 was won by Hilla Limann. On 10/24/1979 the inauguration of the Third Republic took place. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The election is categorized as competitive by LIED and as free and fair by V-Dem's EF&FI. Their CEI, however, scores it as of ambiguous electoral cleanliness. As per FH, for 1979, the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. For the remaining regime period the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. Additionally, political liberties continued to be coded as absent (LIED). V-Dem's PLCI outcomes score an ambiguous presence. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For 1980, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the following year, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

12/31/1981 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date, a military coup orchestrated by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings unfolded, toppling Limann from power. Subsequent to the coup, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), led by Rawlings and comprising a coalition of military and civilian supporters, assumed control of the country (McLaughlin/Owusu-Ansah 1995, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 62, Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 79).²² The authoritarian PNDC government established a Constitutional Advisory Committee in 1991 to formulate proposals for a new constitution. After additional amendments in a Consultative Assembly, the constitution received approval through a popular referendum in April 1992. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. From 1982 to 1990, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. In 1991, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. In 1992, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Besides, LIED still scores an absence of political liberties for the entire period. V-Dem's PLCI states

them as not really present in 1982, as absent from 1983 to 1989 and as not really present again from 1990 onwards.

12/29/1992 End Military (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in November and December. These elections resulted in the victory of Rawlings and his National Democratic Congress (NDC), with the party assuming office in January 1993 (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 29).²³ While due to the victory of Rawlings the regime elite was more or less the same, the legitimization of the regime was different, hence, a regime change is coded. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Electoral competitiveness is categorized as not present by LIED until 1995. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI scores vary between ambiguous and somewhat electoral freedom, fairness and cleanliness. Per FH's evaluation for the period until 1994, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. In 1995 the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. For the remaining period the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. Besides, political liberties were still not present until 1999 and present from 2000 onwards (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI scores them as somewhat present until 1994. Ever since 1995 they are fully present. From 1993 to 1995, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. Afterwards, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. From 1993 to 1995, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For 1996, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive.

12/28/2000 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Liberal Democracy: The ruling NDC was defeated in the second round of a closely contested presidential election (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 62).²⁴ After the 2000 general election, John Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party served as Ghana's president from 01/07/2001. He was re-elected in 2004, marking the first peaceful transfer of power under the fourth republic. In 2008, Nana Akufo-Addo of the ruling party lost a close election to John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress. Mills passed away, and Vice President John Mahama succeeded him on 07/24/2012. Mahama became president after the 2012 general election, solidifying Ghana's status as a stable democracy. In 2016, Nana Akufo-Addo won the presidency and was re-elected in 2020 after a tightly contested election.²⁵ On 12/07/2024 general elections were held and John Mahama, former president from 2012 to 2017, of the National Democratic Congress won the presidency outright and his running-mate Jane Naana Opoku-Agyemang became the first female Vice-President of Ghana. In the parliamentary elections the NDC achieved a landslide victory with 185 seats, while the ruling New Patriotic Party won 87 seats.²⁶ While the nation has a fairly commendable history of protecting civil liberties, issues such as discrimination against women and LGBT+ individuals endure. Per FH's scoring for the period until 2002, the country is classified as free with a score of 5, which falls into our interpretation of the rather free category. From 2003 onward the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Besides, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate that political liberties were constantly present since 2000. Judicial independence and the rule of law exhibit certain vulnerabilities, corruption poses challenges to governmental effectiveness, and the rise of political violence is becoming a growing concern.²⁷ Increasing threats and violence against journalists may lead to self-censorship and inhibit liberties of speech and expression. LGBT+ rights are repressed by the government and discrimination against women remains an issue.²⁸ However, Ghana holds fair and free, multi-party, regular elections. Ghana is a presidential democracy, where both the parliament and the president are directly elected.²⁹ From this time onwards, the regime is consistently coded as a democracy in all data sets (BMR, GWF, HTW, LIED, MCM, RoW). Based on our observations, multiparty

executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 2000, LIED categorizes elections in the country as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as free and fair while their CEI scores them as somewhat clean. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 3, between substantial limitations and executive parity or subordination. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Berry 1994, Jeffries 1989b, Pinkney 1997, Zagel 2010)

Notes

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_Coast_\(British_colony\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_Coast_(British_colony))

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana>

³ V-Dem's JCE and LCE do not provide data for Ghana prior to 1902.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1956_Gold_Coast_general_election

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1956_Gold_Coast_general_election

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1956_Gold_Coast_general_election

⁸ <https://africanelections.tripod.com/gh.html>

⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kwame-Nkrumah>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_Ghanaian_constitutional_referendum

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_People%27s_Party; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nkrumaism>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_general_elections_in_Ghana#cite_note-independence-15

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1965_Ghanaian_parliamentary_election

¹⁴ <https://africanelections.tripod.com/gh.html>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_Ghanaian_parliamentary_election

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_Ghanaian_parliamentary_election; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Akufo-Addo

¹⁷ <https://www.modernghana.com/news/844453/13-january-1972-remembering-the-1972-coup-in-ghana.html>

¹⁸ https://photius.com/countries/ghana/national_security/ghana_national_security_the_akuffo_coup_197~150.html

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Ghana

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Rawlings

²¹ <https://africanelections.tripod.com/gh.html>

²² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jerry-J-Rawlings>

²³ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996?lang=en

²⁴ <https://africanelections.tripod.com/gh.html>

²⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana#History>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Ghanaian_general_election

²⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-world/2022>

²⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-world/2023>

²⁹ <https://democracyinafrica.org/democracy-monitor/ghana/>

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