



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Ghana is slightly smaller than the United Kingdom, or about the same size as the U.S. state of Michigan. Its three climatic zones include the southern forest belt (warm and humid), the coastal belt (warm and dry), and the northern grasslands (hot and dry). Forests cover about 35 percent of the country but are threatened by deforestation. A dam on the Volta River created Lake Volta, one of the largest artificial lakes in the world.

Rain falls primarily between April and October. Ghana is hot and dry for the rest of the year; temperatures reach above 100°F (38°C). From late November to early January, hot, dry, and dusty harmattan winds blow across the north. Temperatures in the southeast range from 74°F (23°C) in October to 86°F (30°C) in June.

History

Trade and Colonization

Ghana takes its name, though not its modern boundaries, from one of the great inland trading empires that flourished in West Africa from the fourth to the eleventh centuries AD. Portuguese traders arrived in 1471. They mined gold and

established headquarters for their slave trade. The area they controlled became known as the Gold Coast, and various European powers established forts there.

In 1874, Britain took control of the Gold Coast and established Accra as the capital in 1876. After years of fighting with the Asante in the interior, the British gained control of the area in 1901. By 1902, the British controlled all of what is now Ghana. The colony was ruled indirectly, through a system of traditional chiefs who took orders from the British. During this period, the British established the cocoa trade, which became the mainstay of Ghana's economy. Other advances were made in developing the economy and the education system. However, a growing sense of nationalism led Ghanaians to pressure the British for more representation in the government, beginning in the late 1800s.

Independence and Military Rule

The Convention People's Party (CPP), under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, won legislative elections in 1951, and for the first time the African majority controlled the government. On 6 March 1957, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African colony to gain independence from Britain. Three years later, the country became a republic and Nkrumah was elected president. His socialist policies led to a significant drop in the standard of living. While he was on his way to

Vietnam in 1966, Nkrumah was deposed by a military coup. The coup's leaders charged Nkrumah's government with corruption, dictatorship, and abuse of power. Elections were held in 1969. However, popular discontent grew after the government implemented austerity measures in response to economic difficulties, and the military again took over the government in 1972.

In 1979, five weeks before the nation was to vote on a new constitution, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, with a group of junior officers and enlisted men, overthrew the government, arrested dozens of government officials, and executed eight of them (including three former heads of state). Rawlings held the planned elections on a new constitution and in three months turned power over to a newly elected civilian government. However, Rawlings was not satisfied with government performance and again seized power in 1981. He outlawed political parties, suspended the constitution, and appointed a seven-member Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC).

Political Stability and Economic Reform

In 1988, a national assembly was established, but members could not belong to political parties. The assembly was to represent different walks of life rather than political views. A constituent assembly, composed of elected and appointed officials, later helped draft a constitution to legalize political parties and provide for elections in 1992. Rawlings won the presidential race and began to improve economic conditions. He was credited with creating one of Africa's most stable economies, and his popularity allowed him to win a second (and, by law, final) term as president in 1996.

Rawlings's ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) declared Vice President John Atta Mills its candidate for the 2000 presidential election. Mills lost to New Patriotic Party (NPP) leader John Kufuor, who became president in the first nonviolent transfer of power since Ghana's independence. Kufuor successfully reduced inflation and was reelected to a second term. In December 2008 elections, John Atta Mills of the NDC narrowly won but died in office in July 2012. Vice President John Dramani Mahama was sworn in as the new president and was subsequently elected to the position in December 2012, though Ghana's supreme court did not officially declare him the winner until August 2013. In January 2017, Mahama was succeeded by NPP opposition candidate Nana Akufo-Addo, marking the first time an incumbent president was beaten in an election.

With several successive peaceful elections, Ghana is widely considered one of the most stable democracies in Africa. This stability has allowed strong economic growth for years, though that growth has slowed recently because of high budget deficits and fiscal instability.

THE PEOPLE

Population

While nearly the entire population of Ghana is Black African, it is divided into more than 75 ethnic groups, each with its

own language and cultural heritage. Violence between these various ethnic groups is rare, although social interaction is limited and tensions sometimes surface.

The largest ethnic group is the Akan (46 percent), of which the major subgroups are the Asante (in Kumasi and the center of the country) and the Fante (in the center of the coastal region). Other major ethnic groups include the Mole-Dagbani (19 percent), Ewe (13 percent), and the Ga-Dangme (7 percent). The Dagomba, Dagaaba, and Gonja ethnic groups live in the north. A few Europeans, Lebanese merchants, and some Indians and Chinese live in Ghana. The nation's two largest cities are Kumasi and Accra. Over half of the population lives in urban areas.

Language

English is Ghana's official language, partly because of the country's colonial association with Great Britain and partly because there are so many ethnic languages that no single one could effectively serve as the official language. English is used in school, business, and government, and most Ghanaians speak some English. Each of Ghana's ethnic groups has a native tongue, the most significant of which include Akan, Ewe, Dagomba, and Dangme. Akan has several dialects, and many Ghanaians primarily speak some form of Akan. Its Asante dialect is the most commonly used native tongue for communication between ethnic groups; otherwise, English is used for such communications. The Bureau of Ghana Languages publishes materials in all of the major languages and helps to develop government language policies, in addition to promoting and documenting Ghana's native languages.

Religion

About 71 percent of all Ghanaians belong to one of several Christian churches; Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian churches have the most patrons, followed by Protestant and Catholic congregations. Muslims comprise about 20 percent of the population. Traditional African beliefs and practices still play a major role in society and are often retained regardless of other religious affiliation. A small portion of the population exclusively worships according to indigenous beliefs. Most Ghanaians take their religion seriously, and religion plays an important part in a person's social life and in cultural events. Christians usually spend Sundays attending church and church-related activities.

Indigenous beliefs are characterized by a belief in a Supreme Being who has created all things and has given various degrees of power to all living (animate) and nonliving (inanimate) things. Because the Supreme Being cannot be approached directly, Ghanaians often communicate with him through intermediaries, which can include animate and inanimate objects, as well as ancestor spirits. Accordingly, ancestor veneration is an important aspect of Ghanaian culture. These traditional beliefs are often referred to by outsiders as *animism* because of their emphasis on showing reverence for living things. However, many Ghanaians would not accept the term *animism* to describe their worship. Traditional faith also includes a belief in wizards, witches, demons, magic potions, and other supernatural phenomena

collectively known as *juju*.

Integral to traditional worship are various rites related to birth, puberty, marriage, and death. These are performed within the family or community. In addition, entire towns or regions celebrate seasonal festivals, through which people honor the dead or ask for blessings.

General Attitudes

Ghanaians are generally warm, extremely friendly, and sociable—even with strangers. They may be boisterous at times, which can make for animated arguments and celebrations. Ghanaians tend to take life at a relaxed pace, viewing time as a series of events rather than a matter of hours or minutes. "Take time" is a common phrase indicating that things need not be rushed. Tolerance and acceptance are typical individual characteristics.

Group (family and community) needs usually take precedence over personal desires. For example, a person who earns a wage often shares his or her income with family members, and remittances from Ghanaians working abroad sometimes support entire families. Ghanaians show great respect to the elderly, the well-educated, the wealthy, persons with royal lineage, and persons who are noted for their hard work or integrity.

Ghanaians are proud of their status as the first sub-Saharan colony to gain independence from a European power. Although greatly influenced by Western civilization, most Ghanaians desire to develop a culture that is uniquely African.

Personal Appearance

Ghanaian dress is generally conservative. Nearly everyone considers it important to be clean and properly dressed in public. Casual attire is the rule for most occasions, although a dress or suit and tie is required for more formal instances. Regardless of what one wears, the type of fabric can reflect one's status, and people generally value the quality of materials over the style of clothing.

Western dress is standard in most areas, but officials often wear traditional clothing for ceremonial occasions. These outfits vary by region and ethnic group. For example, Asante, Fante, and Ewe men wear robes made of *kenté* cloth (colorful woven strips of cloth sewn together). In the south, men may wear a long, colored cloth wrapped around the body somewhat like a toga. Northern men wear a *smock* (a long tunic, sometimes made from *kenté* cloth). Muslim men generally wear colorful, long embroidered tunics (called *zalalia*) over pants.

Ghanaian women usually wear a traditional, long wraparound skirt; a separate top; and a headscarf. They wrap extra cloth at the hips or add it to the sleeves. A head cloth, if worn, often matches a woman's dress. Women often wear bold colors and large prints.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

A handshake is important when greeting most people,

although Muslims avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex. Among some groups, male friends may shake hands first and, while pulling the palms slowly away, grasp each other's middle finger with a thumb and middle finger to make a snapping sound. In the north and among Muslims, people greet by shaking hands and bowing.

Regardless of the gestures or words used in greeting, the act of greeting another person is extremely important. To ignore a greeting or to fail to greet someone is a serious insult to most Ghanaians. Most greetings are in the dominant local language and are followed by questions about one's health, family welfare, journey, and so forth.

Before one begins a conversation, a general greeting such as *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, or *Good evening* is necessary. People may also use local-language greetings, such as *Ete sen* ("Hello," in Akan), *Anu lah* (in Dagomba), and *Wazooloo* (in Ewe). When addressing a person of higher status, one follows the greeting with *Sir* or *Madame*. When greeting a respected elder or someone of royal descent, one often bows slightly, with the left hand placed behind the back.

Children refer to any adult who is well-known to the family as *aunt* or *uncle* (or *grandma* or *grandpa* for older people), even when they are not related. By the same token, adults of the same age might refer to each other as *brother* or *sister*, regardless of their relationship, and will use *auntie* and *uncle* for respected older people.

Gestures

Courtesy is important. Gesturing, eating, or passing items with the left hand is impolite. Among some groups, it is improper to let the sole of one's foot point at another person. It is not considered polite to place feet on chairs, desks, or tables—especially those being used by someone else. Knocking the hands together, palms up, in front of the body can mean "please." To wave, Ghanaians move the hand from side to side; repetitively curling the fingers with the palm faced out means "come here." Friends of the same gender may often hold hands while walking or speaking. Couples might also hold hands, but showing any more affection in public is less acceptable. Personal space is rather limited in Ghana, and people stand close to one another when conversing.

Visiting

Friendly social relations and visiting play key roles in everyday life. Friends and relatives visit one another frequently, often unannounced, and appreciate visits from others. In some areas, people prefer to dress up and visit on Sundays. Ghanaians work hard to accommodate their guests. Most visits occur in the home. Before entering a gate or door, one calls out *A-goo*, instead of knocking, to announce one's presence; if someone is at home, they respond with *A-meeh*. Guests bring a small gift—juice, bread, or biscuits, for example—for their hosts. Guests are welcomed with *Akwaaba* (in Akan), *Woézo* (in Ewe), or *Na tuma dabgani* (in Dagomba).

Some hosts prefer that guests remove their shoes when entering the home or certain rooms in the family compound; this practice is especially common among Muslims. Guests

are nearly always served water and often other refreshments. Refusing these offers is impolite. Visitors are usually welcome to stay as long as they wish. People generally avoid visiting during mealtime, but an unexpected guest would be invited to share the meal. When a visit is over, guests are often accompanied to the bus stop or taxi stand or given a ride home. Leaving them on their own can be considered impolite.

Eating

In southern Ghana and among the wealthy throughout the country, families eat at a table; most families in the north eat around a mat on the floor. Elders are served first to show honor and respect. Children may eat separately from the adults. Wealthy families usually eat together. Ghanaians eat meals with their right hand. They wash their hands in a bowl of water before and after the meal. One forms certain foods, such as *fufu* (a doughlike combination of plantains and cassava), into a ball with the right hand before eating. Sometimes a ball of food is broken in half and indented with the thumb to serve as a "spoon" for soup. A burp after eating indicates satisfaction with the meal.

Going to restaurants to socialize and have a few drinks is common among those who can afford it. A number of ethnic and Western restaurants have opened across the country. Cheaper fare is available at open-air establishments where people make and sell local foods; these have outdoor seating.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

Extended families of three or four generations often share one household. Depending on the family's home, each nuclear family may occupy its own structure within a family compound or its own room within a larger house.

Traditionally, Ghanaian families were large. In recent years, family size has decreased as family planning methods have become available, greater focus is placed on educating children (which is relatively expensive for the average family), and the economy has begun moving away from agricultural production (which necessitated large families to help on the farm). Today, the average Ghanaian woman gives birth to three or four children.

Family structure may be either matrilineal or patrilineal, depending on the ethnic group. The Akan are matrilineal, while most other groups are patrilineal. Family structure determines whether inheritance is passed through the wife's family or the husband's family. It also specifies through which side of the family a person's bloodline is traced.

Parents and Children

Children take on household responsibilities at a young age. The youngest children are usually in charge of washing dishes. Older children often fetch water from a well, river, or communal tap, if the family does not have indoor plumbing. Girls have more household responsibilities than boys and often carry water, clean the house, take care of younger children, and sometimes cook. In farming families, all members help raise the crops. Boys care for the livestock.

Elderly family members are deeply respected and exercise a great deal of influence on family decisions. Grown children generally expect to care for and support their aging parents. Among the upper class, some people are beginning to invest and save for their retirement instead of relying entirely on their children.

Gender Roles

Regardless of how a family's bloodline is traced, the oldest male leads most family organizations and has financial responsibility for all who live with him. If an extended family lives together, the oldest male leads the entire family, while each man has authority in his nuclear family. Men also make major decisions for the family and do the heavy labor, such as building the house and plowing the fields. When a man dies, his responsibility and authority pass to his oldest son rather than to his wife.

Women manage the household and take care of the children. A growing number of women enter the workforce to help support their families. Women own businesses, hold positions in government, and attend higher education. Women often work as traders, doing most of the in-country buying and selling of goods. However, women are often not as respected as men in the workplace, nor do they receive equal pay for similar jobs. Women in urban areas have greater access to education and economic opportunities than their rural counterparts.

As the role of women outside the home expands, their responsibilities at home remain largely unchanged, particularly in more traditional families. In urban areas, some working couples share the household chores. Wealthy families may also employ maids or nannies. Urban families may be assisted by female relatives who come from rural areas to live with the family.

Housing

Urban

Most urban homes and a growing number of rural homes are made of cement blocks and metal roofing sheets. These homes are good at keeping out rain but can be poorly ventilated and often retain heat in warm weather. Urban homes generally contain a single structure surrounded by a cement wall. Kitchens and bathrooms are usually part of the main house. Some urban families live in compounds similar to those in rural areas.

The poorest Ghanaians, throughout the country, live in small, crowded homes, sometimes located in *zongos* (shantytowns predominantly occupied by Muslims). Two or three generations may share a single room. In these homes, the parents usually share a bed with the children, while the grandparents sleep on foam mattresses on the floor. People may have to sleep in shifts if there is not enough space for everyone to sleep at night. People who own kiosks or market stalls may sleep behind the counters in order to save on accommodation costs and to guard their goods.

Rural

In rural areas, extended families usually live together in a compound. Several generations of the family may build huts on the family's plot of land, all sharing the central courtyard area. In the north, clay walls extend from the outside walls of

each hut, connecting to make a continuous wall around the compound. Roofs are generally made of clay. In these northern rural areas, family compounds are usually established at least 100 feet (30 meters) from the nearest neighbor.

Huts in the south are also made from clay, but the roofs are thatched. If there is more than one room in a hut, the rooms are lined up in a row and share a common porch. The compound may be surrounded by a fence made from bamboo or live trees and shrubs. Compounds in the south are usually built closer to one another than in the north.

The kitchen and bathroom are usually located in separate structures from the rest of the home. The majority of daily activities take place outdoors, with families cooking and socializing in the courtyard. Huts are generally only for sleeping. One hut is devoted to the oldest male and sometimes his wife. If he has more than one wife, each has a hut for herself and her children. Additional huts are reserved for members of the extended family. Livestock generally roam free and return to a gated enclosure for the night.

Interiors

Most homes are sparsely furnished. Bedrooms generally contain only one piece of furniture—a bed; clothes are stored in metal trunks under the bed or along the wall. In urban homes, the living room is considered the most important room and is generally large in proportion to the size of the house. It is usually furnished with couches, chairs, and a coffee table. Floors are usually cement covered with linoleum or carpet. The wealthy decorate their homes in a formal style, often with plush furniture, gold trimmings, chandeliers, and ornate ceilings. In these homes, floors tend to be tile, marble, or carpet.

Most areas have access to electricity, though blackouts are common. Families usually have appliances like fans, televisions, stereos, and refrigerators. Upper- and middle-class families may also have microwaves, freezers, air-conditioning, and personal computers. Secondhand appliances are imported and are affordable for much of the population. Modern conveniences are often status symbols, and families may keep a television or stereo on for much of the day, even if the family isn't home, as a way to show that they own one. In rural areas, running water is a rare luxury that requires a water tank located on a tower near the home. Many upper- and middle-class urban families have indoor plumbing.

Ownership

Great pride accompanies home ownership. A home generally stays in a family for generations. It's unusual to sell a home unless dictated by financial hardship. In rural areas, most people own their homes. People generally have access to family land, and building materials are affordable and easily obtained. In urban areas, most people rent their homes. Most landlords require two years of rent in advance, making accommodations difficult to secure. Home ownership remains out of reach for most urban residents due to the scarcity of land, rising prices, and lack of access to mortgages. Fraud is common in the real estate market, and this discourages many from even trying to secure a piece of land. In order to build a home, a variety of permits must be obtained, which is

sometimes possible only by paying bribes.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Families arrange some marriages, though children have the right to reject possible matches. A young man, accompanied by his father, may approach a young woman's father to ask for her hand in marriage. This visit is called *knocking*. The young man often brings gifts, which usually include alcoholic beverages. In the past, a woman's father accepted or rejected the offer without input from his daughter. Today, most fathers consult with their daughters and generally honor their decisions.

A growing number of young people choose their spouses. While traditionally boys and girls socialized separately, today it is common for them to socialize together in groups. Couples generally form within these groups. In urban areas, young people may date a number of people before marriage. In rural areas, any one-on-one courtship is expected to lead to marriage. Rural people more often follow traditional courtship patterns, which involve short visits, often with chaperones present, and exchanging small gifts. Newly formed rural couples and urban couples in serious relationships are often referred to as husband and wife. A growing number of couples, particularly in urban areas, date casually, but the older generation generally disapproves. For this reason, couples often date in secret and only approach their families about the relationship when they are ready to get engaged.

Traditionally, the groom gives the bride's family a bride-price before the wedding to indicate that he is taking responsibility for her. In northern areas, the bride-price is often four cows (equal to about two years of salary for the average wage earner). In other areas, the bride-price may include clothing, fabric, cash, or drinks. It is common and accepted for the groom's family to help with the payment of the bride-price. Still, it may take years for the man to save up to pay the bride-price.

Marriage in Society

In Ghana, marriage is traditionally viewed as the union of two individuals and two families. Parents are closely involved in their children's marriages. For example, if a man is working abroad or in another part of the country, both the engagement and traditional marriage can be arranged by his family and may take place while he is away, though this has become less common. Parents may also help with marital problems. For example, in the event of a marital conflict, a man may speak with his father, who then informs the woman's father. The two fathers then attempt to resolve the issue. If the problem persists, the two families may meet to work out a solution.

Infidelity is common, though not practiced openly. Many married men have mistresses, and a growing number of women also have extramarital relationships. Although polygamy is illegal, traditional and religious customs allow a man to marry multiple women. Of those women who are in polygamous marriages, the man can only be legally married to the first wife, so subsequent wives have no legal standing. In recent years, polygamy has become less common, particularly in urban areas. Sexual relations between same-sex

partners are illegal, and same-sex marriage is not legally recognized.

Divorce is uncommon and not well accepted. Unhappy couples may choose to live separately but rarely do people legally divorce, often because of a perception that the legal process is long and complicated.

Weddings

Weddings may include a combination of civil, traditional, and religious ceremonies. Regardless of the type of ceremony, the couple dresses in either traditional attire (usually *kenté* cloth, colorful woven strips of cloth) or formal Western attire (suits for men and dresses or wedding gowns for women).

Most couples hold a traditional wedding. The couple dresses in formal traditional attire, which varies by region and ethnic group. The wedding begins with final negotiations over the bride-price, although most of the arrangements take place beforehand. The bride is generally not present for this portion of the wedding, which may last hours. Once the bride-price has been finalized—but before the bride appears—a game is often played in which other women are brought out and the groom is asked if each is his wife. The bride then enters and the celebration begins. Guests celebrate the marriage with food, drinks, traditional music, and dancing.

Christians usually have both a traditional ceremony and a religious ceremony. Christian ceremonies usually include a mass. The couple also exchanges vows and rings. Nearly all Muslims hold only a religious ceremony, which is conducted by an *imam* (religious leader) in the presence of at least two witnesses, one from each family.

In order for a marriage to be legally recognized, it must contain a civil ceremony, which is often held after the traditional or religious ceremony. A growing number of couples choose to hold only a civil ceremony in order to avoid the high cost of a traditional or religious wedding.

Life Cycle

Birth

A woman may go to great lengths to keep her pregnancy a secret for as long as possible, often fearing that by revealing it or discussing it publicly she may expose the baby to witchcraft. Because of a high rate of infant mortality, in rural areas a child is not considered a member of society until eight days after birth. At that time, a celebration is held at which the child is given a name and then brought out in public for the first time.

Most names are religious in nature (traditional, Christian, or Muslim) or based on unusual circumstances surrounding the pregnancy or birth. For example, a child whose father dies before the birth may be named *Afetorgbor* (“the husband is back,” implying that the man lives on through his child), while a child born despite complications may be called *Mawuko* (“only God,” indicating a belief that the child could only have been saved by God). Ghanaians also have day names, which are based on the day of the week on which the person was born. For example, the name *Kwame* is associated with Saturday, as seen in the name of former president Kwame Nkrumah, who was born on a Saturday. Ghanaians may use their day name as their legal name, as a nickname, or not at all.

Milestones

In Ghana, becoming an adult is not a matter of reaching a certain age. People are considered adults when they are no longer dependent on their parents, demonstrated by milestones such as marrying, obtaining employment, or moving into their own home. Adulthood is also related to a person's position and reputation in the community. A young person who has completed secondary school and behaves maturely may be considered an adult before an older person who is not as well respected and did not finish school.

Traditional coming-of-age rituals have been largely replaced with Christian ceremonies. Rituals such as a Catholic child's First Communion are often more significant than traditional events. Still, a few cultures hold coming-of-age ceremonies, though the practice is becoming less common and holds less significance than in the past. Teenage girls may take part in a series of rituals, some lasting as long as a week, after which they are considered women and eligible for marriage. For example, among the Krobos, in eastern Ghana, young women participate in the bead ceremony (named for the beads the young women wear), in which their heads are shaved. Although Ghana was among the first African countries to outlaw female circumcision, the practice remains in a few areas. Boys were once put through tests of bravery, but these are no longer widely practiced.

Even after reaching adulthood, people continue to be referred to as youth. It is not until the transition from adult to elder that Ghanaians are referred to as adults. Elders, both men and women, are afforded great respect and often gather to help make decisions and resolve disputes within the community. The transition from adult to elder takes place gradually and is not marked with a formal event. Most people become elders in their fifties or sixties. However, a younger person with a good education who is considered wise beyond his or her years or who is well respected can be considered an elder in the community. Likewise, a 60-year-old who is not considered to act his or her age or is thought to drink too much may never be an elder.

Death

Funerals are major social occasions that include large gatherings of family and friends. Festivities include food, alcohol, drumming, and dancing. The length of the event depends on the ethnic group and the status of the deceased. Usually, one day is set aside for the actual funeral, and another one or more days are reserved for mourning and celebrating the deceased. In the north and among Muslim communities, burial is immediate; funeral ceremonies take place one week and then 40 days after burial. In other communities, the burial may be delayed to allow the family to organize the funeral rites. A growing number of churches are replacing festive funerals with all-night prayer sessions in an effort to curb improper behavior.

Death is seen as a transition to another world, often involving a journey over a hill or across a river. To help the deceased's spirit make the journey, money for food and drink is traditionally put in the coffin or tools of the person's trade are given to allow the person to earn money.

Diet

The Ghanaian diet consists primarily of yams, cassava, millet, maize, beans, plantains, and rice. A typical southern dish is *fufu* (a doughlike combination of plantains and cassava). *Ampesi* (boiled yams or plantains with sauce) is also common. In the north, the average family eats two or three daily meals with *tuo zaafi* (a thick porridge of corn or millet; often called *T.Z.*). People also eat boiled maize dumplings called *banku* (made with fermented maize) and *kenkey* (made with unfermented maize). Soups and sauces are made from palm or peanut oil. Ghanaians enjoy hot and spicy food, so most meals are accompanied by a sauce made from peppers. People enjoy meat, fish, or chicken with their meals when they can afford them. The diet is supplemented with a variety of tropical fruits and vegetables.

Recreation

Sports

Most Ghanaians, particularly men and boys, are highly devoted to soccer, the national sport. The national team, the Black Stars, enjoys a strong following. Ghanaians are proud of their teams, which have performed well in the Olympics, the World Cup, and other competitions. Many Ghanaians also follow European teams. Boys play soccer whenever they can. Children without a soccer ball may fashion their own out of plastic bags or old pieces of cloth. People often gather to watch games on television or in stadiums.

Ghanaians are also fond of volleyball, basketball, track and field, and boxing. Bukom, a suburb of Accra, is Ghana's boxing center. The majority of the country's boxers are trained in Bukom, and some have gained international recognition.

Leisure

The average Ghanaian does not have much time for leisure activities. Recreation takes place in the few remaining evening hours after work is finished. The most common use of this time is visiting with family and friends and attending religious services. Other activities vary according to region and availability.

People enjoy the theater, cultural presentations, and music and dance festivals. Ghana has a prolific movie industry, which exports films throughout Africa. Most people enjoy watching television, especially the European soccer leagues, and Ghanaian and Nigerian films. Radio broadcasts are very popular. In areas without electricity, people gather around battery-operated radios. Nightclubs, discos, and casinos are popular with a small segment of the population in urban areas. Men often get together in the evenings at their favorite drinking spots. Women spend their leisure time socializing and watching television and movies.

People enjoy a variety of board games and card games. The most popular is *ludo*, in which players race to get their game pieces to the finish line by rolling dice. People also play a strategic card game called *spa*, which uses only part of a deck of playing cards. The entire outcome is determined by who wins the final round. *Draughts* (called *damii* in Twi), a game similar to checkers, is popular among men and children and is played on the street, in courtyards, at home, or in cafés.

Young people spend much of their time socializing in the evening, after homework and household chores are complete

and the adults have gone to bed. In urban areas, it is not uncommon to see large groups of teenagers at night walking up and down the streets talking. Children often make their own toys. Boys often make toy cars using bamboo, wires, tin cans, and plastic bottles. Old rubber from flip-flops may be used for the tires.

Vacation

On holidays, people often visit the beach or hotel swimming pools, which charge small entrance fees. Vacationing is a relatively new concept in Ghana. The vast majority travels only when going back to a home village or attending a funeral or other family event. Local tourism is becoming more popular as people visit tourist sites within their country. The wealthy vacation abroad, most often in London and Dubai.

The Arts

The popular dance music known as *highlife* originated in Ghana and has since spread to many parts of Africa. Heavily influenced by jazz and other Western music, *highlife* typically is played by bands of guitars and horns. In recent years, *hiplife* has become popular. Based on *highlife*, *hiplife* fuses West African beats with Western hip-hop. Traditional dance and music are performed at special festivals and funerals. Common instruments include wooden *atenteban* (flutes), *balafon* (xylophones), and various types of drums.

Ghanaian textiles such as *kenté* cloth and *ntoma* have colorful geometric patterns and are considered to be among the most beautiful in Africa. Wood-carvers create pieces with intricate designs and inlaid bronze or bone. Ghanaian artisans are also known for their intricate drums, pottery, and jewelry.

Holidays

National public holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), Independence Day (6 March), Good Friday (Friday before Easter Sunday), Easter Monday, Labor Day (1 May), Africa Day (25 May), Republic Day (1 July), *Eid al-Fitr* (the Muslim feast at the end of Islam's holy fasting month of *Ramadan*), *Eid al-Adha* (the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice), Founder's Day (21 September), Farmer's Day (first Friday in December), Christmas (25 December), and Boxing Day (26 December). Muslim holidays are set according to the Islamic calendar, which is a lunar calendar.

New Year's Day

For Christians, New Year's festivities begin with church services on New Year's Eve. Most families then gather for a nice meal. In Accra, a large street festival is held in the evening on New Year's Day. Muslims generally do not celebrate the New Year on 1 January, but they may hold social gatherings or organize soccer games on this day.

Muslims celebrate Muslim New Year, which falls later in the year. On the Muslim New Year's Day, they gather for a special prayer, giving thanks for the previous year and asking for blessings upon the nation and prominent public figures. People then return to their homes for a party and a special meal, which is often shared with non-Muslims.

Religious Holidays

For religious holidays, celebrations generally include attending religious services, visiting family and friends, and preparing special meals. For many families, this is the only

time of the year when they eat meat (goat, beef, mutton, or pork) instead of the usual fish or chicken. Most men have new clothing made for the family; often one large piece of fabric is used to make clothing for all members of the family.

For Christians, Easter is the most important religious holiday, followed closely by Christmas. Celebrations resemble those held for other religious holidays. Many people working in urban areas make a special effort to be with their families in rural areas at Easter.

During the holy month of *Ramadan*, devout Muslims fast during the day. *Ramadan* ends on *Eid al-Fitr*, one of the most important holidays for Muslims in Ghana. Men make a special effort to pray at the mosque at this time. A sheep is purchased and slaughtered for the holiday meal.

Patriotic Holidays

Independence Day and Republic Day are the most widely celebrated patriotic holidays. Such holidays often involve government-sponsored events, but most people do not attend, instead treating the holiday as a welcome day off. Many Ghanaians use these days to visit beaches, swimming pools, waterfalls, and nightclubs. They may also organize soccer friendly games.

Other Holidays

Boxing Day comes from the British tradition of giving small boxed gifts to service employees. Today, most people spend the day visiting friends and relatives. Valentine's Day is celebrated by a growing number of Ghanaians, particularly the urban youth. Men may spend considerable amounts of money on gifts (such as cards, chocolates, jewelry, and perfume) for women. Couples often go out for a nice meal. Farmer's Day is particularly important in rural areas and honors Ghana's agricultural sector, which employs nearly half of the population. Prizes in different categories are awarded to farmers, and the government offers subsidized farming equipment for sale on this day.

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

Ghana is a presidential republic. The president is head of state and head of government. The president and vice president are directly elected by popular vote on the same ticket and are eligible for reelection once. If a presidential candidate does not win a majority of votes in the first election, a runoff is held. Parliament has 275 members, who are elected through a majoritarian system to serve four-year terms.

Ghana is divided into 10 regions and further into administrative districts. Although funding is controlled by the central government, these local districts have authority over education, health, agriculture, and social welfare. Local chiefs also have influence in traditional affairs; though they have no constitutional authority, their opinions are sought and valued.

Political Landscape

While a few minor parties contest elections and gain a small number of seats in Parliament, politics in Ghana is dominated by the social democratic National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the conservative New Patriotic Party (NPP).

These two parties have alternated being in power since 1992, and elections, both presidential and parliamentary, have been close in recent years.

The president has strong powers relative to Parliament and the judiciary. As a result, members of the president's political party often enjoy privileged positions within government. In particular, the president is able to choose ministers from elected members of Parliament. This serves to weaken Parliament's independence from the executive branch. A bribery scandal rocked the country's judiciary in 2015, leading to the dismissal of several judges.

Conflict between parties and within parties is heated. Despite this discord, several successive elections and transitions of power since the legalization of political parties in 1992 have been nonviolent and generally peaceful. Because of this, Ghana is widely considered one of the most stable democracies in Africa.

Government and the People

Freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly are guaranteed and respected. Though corruption is a concern, corruption levels in Ghana are among the lowest in Africa. Elections are generally considered to be free and fair by outside observers. The voting age is 18. Voter turnout fluctuates but is usually over 60 percent. Presidential elections generally have higher turnout than parliamentary elections. Ghana's political stability has allowed the government to foster economic growth.

Economy

Agriculture employs about half of the labor force. Cacao (from which cocoa is made) is the most important cash crop. Other crops (rice, cassava, peanuts, corn, shea nuts, and bananas) are also grown. Light manufacturing and timber are key industries. Ghana also mines gold, bauxite, manganese, and diamonds. Drought and world price fluctuations for Ghana's exports can cause economic difficulties. Tourism is a significant source of foreign revenue. In recent years, the Ghanaian government has increased commercial oil production, following the discovery of additional offshore oil reserves.

Ghana has been privatizing and modernizing its economy for years. Still, it remains an essentially poor country. Roughly one-quarter of the population lives in poverty. Corruption, income inequality, high budget deficits, and an unstable currency are ongoing challenges for the government. The currency is the *Ghana cedi* (GHS).

Transportation and Communications

While Ghana's transportation system is underdeveloped, an improving bus system connects major cities. Accra's rail connections to Kumasi and Takoradi are unreliable. Most people rely on public transportation, walking, or cycling. The *tro-tro* is a crowded but efficient and inexpensive minibus used for short-distance travel. In the north, bicycles and motorcycles are common means of transportation.

Cellular phones are widespread and far outnumber landlines, which are only available in urban areas. Ghanaians follow local and international news via newspapers, radio, television, and digital media. Ghana has several national and

private television stations. There are two state-owned radio stations and many more that are privately owned. Mail service is often slow. Some people use the informal method of passing information: letters or messages are passed to a driver or passenger traveling in the intended direction. Internet cafés are found across the country, but only about half of the population uses the internet.

Education

Structure

Schools are organized into three levels: primary (six years, beginning at age 5 or 6), junior secondary (three years, beginning at 11 or 12), and senior secondary (three years, beginning at 15 or 16). Schooling is mandatory for nine years (through junior secondary school). However, attendance is not strictly enforced. In urban areas, many children also attend a few years of preschool. After junior secondary school, students are accepted into senior secondary schools based on national test scores. Each city or village has at least one primary school and one junior secondary school. Senior secondary schools are less common, but each administrative district has at least one. If the school is too far to reach by daily transportation, students may board at the school or live with extended family in the area.

Access

Primary and secondary schooling in Ghana is free, although parents must cover a portion of the costs for uniforms and supplies. The majority of schools are public. Private schools are generally of better quality but are not affordable for the average family. Over 80 percent of Ghanaian children attend primary school. However, enrollment rates decrease to about 60 percent at the secondary level. Many students are unable to attend because their families cannot afford the fees associated with schooling. Children may also be kept home to help around the house or on the farm.

A large percentage of Ghana's national budget is spent on education, and efforts to develop the system are ongoing. However, classrooms are often overcrowded, as government spending struggles to keep pace with the growing number of school-age children. In some schools, classes are held in shifts in order to accommodate all students. The quality of education is generally better in urban areas than rural areas. In remote rural schools, students must often share books and desks. In some classrooms, the only teaching equipment is a chalkboard painted on the wall.

School Life

English, science, and mathematics are the most emphasized subjects. Teaching styles rely heavily on memorization and testing. The language of instruction is English, which few children speak before entering school.

Corruption affects all levels of education. Some school officials require students to pay extra fees for after-school classes in order to cover all of the material in the curriculum. Families may use bribes or social connections to get their children into the best schools, including at the university level. Cheating is widespread and generally accepted.

Higher Education

Qualified students may pursue a post-secondary education at one of Ghana's public universities, at private universities, at

teacher-training colleges, or at trade schools. While in the past public universities were the most prestigious, in recent years some private universities have gained recognition for offering quality education in specialized subjects.

Health

Although the government is working to increase the quality and availability of medical care, facilities are limited or understaffed outside of major cities. Malaria and other tropical diseases and the lack of clean water or a modern sewer system are serious health threats even to urban residents. Malaria is the leading cause of death among Ghanaian children under age five. Intestinal disorders are common. Cholera affects some people without adequate sanitation. HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis are growing problems. Many people rely on herbal medicine and traditional healing. Ghanaian law recognizes traditional healing and makes it a partner of Western medicine within the national health system. Infant mortality rates, while lower than in the past, remain high.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Embassy of Ghana, 3512 International Drive NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 686-4520; web site www.ghanaembassydc.org. Ghana Tourism Authority, web site www.ghana.travel.

Country and Development Data

Capital	Accra
Population	32,372,889 (rank=44)
Area (sq. mi.)	92,098 (rank=80)
Area (sq. km.)	238,533
Human Development Index	142 of 189 countries
Gender Inequality Index	133 of 162 countries
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$5,300
Adult Literacy	84% (male); 74% (female)
Infant Mortality	33 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	63 (male); 65 (female)
Currency	Ghana cedi