

Ghana

Period of democratic transition: 2000

Pro-democracy civic movement: not present

Following a series of alternating civilian and military governments, Jerry Rawlings led a coup in 1979 that returned power to a civilian government. However, the new administration did not live up to Rawlings's expectations, and in 1981 he seized power, banning political parties and free expression. His ensuing administration was responsible for both substantial economic progress and grave human rights violations.

Since Rawlings's takeover, the transition to democracy has been gradual, beginning with his reluctant adoption of a multiparty constitution in 1992 and ending with the democratic transfer of power in 2000. After a ban on opposition parties was lifted with the new constitution in 1992, presidential and legislative elections were scheduled. With little time to organize a coherent campaign, the opposition lost the presidential election and subsequently boycotted the legislative election, facilitating the continuation of unchallenged one-party rule. Antigovernment opposition mounted during 1995 as high inflation eroded living standards and reports of government corruption incensed the public. During an opposition march in Accra, armed government supporters opened fire against the demonstrators, killing five. The opposition made a stronger showing in the 1996 election, largely considered to be more open than that in 1992. Nevertheless, Rawlings was returned to power, although transparency and accountability remained absent. Despite fears that he intended to hold on to power, Rawlings abided by the constitution and stepped down in 2000 after his handpicked successor, John Atta Mills, was defeated by opposition leader John Kufuor in the December 2000 poll. This marked the first time in Ghana's history that one democratically elected president was succeeded by another.

During his time in office, Kufuor has made economic growth a priority and was rewarded in 2004 for his policies with a second electoral victory.