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Ghana: Overview and U.S. Policy

Introduction. Ghana stands out in West Africa for its record of stability and peaceful electoral turnovers of power since a transition to multiparty rule in the early 1990s. Rising insecurity and democratic backsliding elsewhere in West Africa have underscored the country's reputation as a stable democracy in a volatile sub-region. U.S.-Ghana relations are warm, premised on shared positions on many foreign policy issues and growing counterterrorism cooperation. People-to-people and cultural ties also are robust; there is a sizable Ghanaian diaspora community in the United States, and a growing population of U.S. citizens residing in Ghana, a major destination for heritage tourism and migration by Black Americans. Members of Congress regularly visit the country; Vice President Harris visited in March 2023. Congressional attention on Ghana has grown amid U.S. concern over a spillover of Islamist extremist violence from West Africa's Sahel region into coastal states.

Politics and Governance. The first sub-Saharan African country to gain liberation from colonial rule, Ghana experienced decades of military governance punctuated by repeated attempts to establish multiparty democracy prior to the adoption of a new multiparty constitution in 1992. Ghana has since held multiple competitive elections. President Nana Akufo-Addo took office in 2017 and won reelection in 2020. Successive governments have generally respected civic freedoms; according to various indices, Ghana is one of the strongest democracies in Africa. Corruption, security force abuses, electoral violence, and discrimination and attacks against sexual minorities nevertheless remain challenges. Journalists have faced harassment and physical violence, including assassinations, for reporting on politically sensitive matters.

Economy. Ghana's economy is more diverse and dynamic than many in West Africa. Gold, crude oil, and cocoa are the country's leading export commodities. The services sector has burgeoned since the mid-2000s, underpinned by growing banking, tourism, transportation, and information and communications technology industries. The economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine have aggravated preexisting challenges. Inflation reached record-high levels in 2022 amid increases in global food and fuel prices and a depreciation of Ghana's currency, the *cedi*. Ghana's public debt burden also surged, and Ghana defaulted on most external debt in December 2022. The Akufo-Addo administration is seeking to restructure the country's debt, a precondition for a pending loan program from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF support is likely to be contingent upon fiscal belt-tightening measures, which may prove politically challenging to implement. China is a major player in Ghana's economy, and is the largest bilateral lender to the country.

Security. Ghana has never experienced a civil war, though disputes over land and succession to local chieftaincy positions have at times spurred wider insecurity. The threat of Islamist extremist violence in Ghana has sparked growing concern in Congress. There has not been a proven extremist attack on Ghanaian soil to date, but Ghanaian authorities warn that armed groups based in Burkina Faso, to Ghana's north, may seek to expand into northern Ghana, as they have done in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, as well as in Benin. Ghana also faces challenges related to low maritime domain awareness and maritime insecurity. Researchers have accused Chinese firms of involvement in illicit fishing in Ghana.

U.S. Assistance and Engagement. U.S. assistance supports a range of development, governance, and security programs, and Ghana is a priority country under several U.S. foreign assistance initiatives. In 2022, the Biden Administration designated Ghana as a priority for engagement under the Global Fragility Act (GFA, Title V of Div. J, P.L. 116-94), alongside other coastal West Africa countries. Ghana also is a focus country under the President's Malaria Initiative and Feed the Future and has had two Millennium Challenge Corporation compacts, the second of which (a power project) concluded in June 2022.

Ghana is a hub for U.S. diplomatic engagement and assistance in the region: the country's capital, Accra, hosts USAID's West Africa Regional Mission, one of four Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Regional Leadership Centers in Africa, and one of two State Department International Law Enforcement Academy regional training centers on the continent. Ghana routinely participates in U.S. military training exercises in the region, and in March 2023 co-hosted Flintlock, U.S. Africa Command's premier annual special operations exercise, along with neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.

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Introduction

By several measures, Ghana is a democratic leader in Africa and an island of stability in a sub-region where insecurity and military seizures of power have proliferated over the past decade. Since a transition from military rule to multiparty politics in the early 1990s, Ghana has held multiple competitive elections and peaceful transfers of power between parties, and successive governments have broadly respected civic freedoms. Corruption, attacks on press freedoms, and discrimination against sexual minorities nevertheless remain problems.

Ghana's economy is more diverse than many in West Africa. Gold, crude oil, and cocoa are the country's most important export commodities; Ghana is the world's second largest exporter of cocoa beans, behind neighboring Côte d'Ivoire. The shocks of COVID-19 and Russia's war on Ukraine have aggravated economic vulnerabilities in Ghana, spurring record-high inflation and a rapid increase of Ghana's debt burden. The economic crisis and tightening fiscal conditions have raised challenges for the pursuit of President Nana Akufo-Addo's flagship development programs as the government has scaled back spending to ease the deficit and restore debt sustainability.

U.S.-Ghana relations have historically been warm, based on shared democratic ideals and close people-to-people ties. There is a sizable Ghanaian-American diaspora community in the United States, and several thousand African Americans live in Ghana; the Akufo-Addo administration has sought to attract heritage tourism and migration to the country by Black Americans. Congress funds a diverse range of U.S. assistance programs in the country, with activities to improve health outcomes, spur agricultural development, enhance public service delivery, curb child labor in the cocoa industry, and strengthen Ghana's security services. Countering violent extremism (CVE) is a growing focus of bilateral ties and U.S. aid, amid a southward expansion of Islamist extremist violence from West Africa's Sahel region. In June 2022, the Biden Administration designated Ghana as a priority country under the Global Fragility Act (GFA, Title V of Div. J, P.L. 116-94) as part of a "Coastal West Africa" sub-region that also includes Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Togo. Several Members had previously voiced concern over the expanding threat of extremism in coastal West Africa and expressed support for the sub-region's prioritization under GFA.¹

Congress has shaped U.S. relations with Ghana through its appropriation and oversight of foreign assistance, though legislative action directly related to Ghana has been limited. Regular Member and staff travel to the country has been a leading avenue of congressional engagement. Ghana's increasingly isolated position as a stable democracy in a region beset by escalating insecurity and authoritarian rule in many countries may spur heightened attention and favor the pursuit of closer U.S.-Ghanaian cooperation. With GFA engagement in coastal West Africa poised to expand in the coming years, funding and oversight of U.S. CVE and security assistance may offer opportunities for Members to shape, direct, evaluate, and articulate their views on U.S. engagement in Ghana.²

¹ See, e.g., remarks by Representative Michael McCaul in House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), "The Biden Administration's Foreign Assistance Priorities and USAID's FY22 Budget Request," hearing, 117th Cong., 1st sess., July 14, 2021; remarks by Representative Sara Jacobs in House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights, "FY2022 Budget and U.S.-Africa Relations," hearing, 117th Cong., 1st sess., December 1, 2021; remarks by Representative Sara Jacobs in HFAC, "The State Department's Foreign Policy Priorities and the FY23 Budget Request," hearing, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., April 28, 2022.

² See House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Development, International Organizations and Global Corporate Social Impact, "Improving the United States' Ability to Prevent and Stabilize Conflict: Global Fragility Act Implementation," hearing, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., May 11, 2022; and CRS Insight IN11938, *Responding to State "Fragility" in Coastal West Africa*, by Tomás F. Husted and Alexis Arief.

Human rights issues in Ghana and growing U.S.-Ghanaian cultural engagement may also attract enhanced congressional consideration and shape bilateral ties. Some Members have expressed concern over a draft law under consideration by Ghana’s parliament that would impose severe penalties on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals, and over attacks on journalists and press freedom in the country.³ On the other hand, Ghana’s efforts to attract heritage tourism and migration by Black Americans, premised in part on diasporic legacies of the transatlantic slave trade, may enable closer bilateral ties and offer opportunities for engagement by Members and their constituents. A new Congressional Ghana Caucus, launched in late 2022, reflects increased congressional attention on issues in the bilateral relationship.

Background and Politics

Ghana was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain liberation from colonial rule, winning independence from Britain in 1957. Kwame Nkrumah, a socialist scholar and politician who led the anti-colonial struggle, became Ghana’s leader at independence. Nkrumah spearheaded efforts to modernize Ghana’s economy and bureaucracy and inculcate Pan-African and socialist values in its citizenry, while establishing Ghana as a one-party state and increasingly repressing dissent.⁴ In 1966, military officers overthrew Nkrumah, setting off two decades of military rule punctuated by intermittent attempts to restore civilian authority that were subverted by multiple coups.

Ghana transitioned to multiparty politics in 1992; today, according to various indices, it is one of the strongest democracies in Africa. Freedom House, in its 2023 *Freedom in the World* index of political rights and civil liberties, ranked Ghana fourth in Africa and classified it as “free.”⁵ It has a de facto two-party system. Political power has alternated between President Akufo-Addo’s New Patriotic Party (NPP), which touts itself as economically liberal, and the nominally social-democratic National Democratic Congress (NDC). In practice, the NPP and NDC have pursued similar policies, focused on reducing poverty, improving services, attracting foreign investment, and fostering industrialization and infrastructure development. Unlike many other legislatures in Africa, Ghana’s Parliament has at times demonstrated an ability to serve as an effective check on the executive, though it arguably remains weak vis-à-vis the presidency.⁶

³ In the 118th Congress, H.R. 1833 and S. 1007 would establish a Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Peoples, noting Ghana’s draft bill as one example of anti-LGBTQI+ developments worldwide. In the 117th Congress, S.Res. 241, recognizing threats to press freedom and free expression worldwide, would have noted death threats against Ghanaian journalist Manasseh Azure Awuni as one example of attacks on freedom of the media in Africa.

⁴ Nkrumah remains a towering figure in Pan-African social commentary and Ghanaian political discourse, though his legacy continues to be debated. For a scholarly account of his administration, see Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017).

⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2023*, 2023. The Economist Intelligence Unit, in its *Democracy Index 2022*, ranked Ghana sixth in Africa, classifying the country as a “flawed democracy.”

⁶ Clement Sefa-Nyarko, “Ghana’s Fourth Republic has been the best the country’s had. But it could be better,” *The Conversation*, June 15, 2022; Ken O. Opalo, “The Politics of Legislative Development,” in Gabrielle Lynch and Peter VonDoepp, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Democratization in Africa* (London: Routledge, 2019): 131-146.

Ghana outperforms many sub-regional peers on measures of governance and institutional capacity.⁷ Northern Ghana lags the south in many development indicators, however, a pattern Ghanaian and international observers often refer to as Ghana’s “north-south divide.” Administrative strength also is more limited outside of urban zones; according to one analysis, “the state’s administration extends to the entire country but varies in quality [...] despite administrative reforms in recent years, the visibility of the state is limited in rural areas.”⁸ Poverty rates are highest in Ghana’s Northern, Upper West, and Upper East regions and lowest in Greater Accra, surrounding the capital (see **Fig. 1**).⁹ The rising threat of a spillover of Islamist extremist violence from Burkina Faso into Ghana’s north (see “Security Issues”) has renewed attention to regional disparities in Ghana and spurred the Ghanaian government and its international partners, including the United States, to intensify development efforts in the north.¹⁰

The Akufo-Addo Administration (2017-Present)

President Akufo-Addo took office in 2017 and began a second term in January 2021.¹¹ He has identified “structural transformation to value-added activities,” infrastructure investment, education, and improving access to electricity and water as among his top priorities.¹² His administration has embarked on a series of flagship development initiatives, including the Free Senior High School program, which publicly funds education past ninth grade; One District, One Factory, to establish factories in each of Ghana’s 275 districts; and Agenda 111, to build or rehabilitate 111 health facilities across the country. In public remarks and strategy documents, President Akufo-Addo has placed an emphasis on

Figure 1. Ghana



Source: CRS; data from State Department and Esri.

⁷ See, for instance, Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Ghana Country Report 2022*, 2022; and Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance: Index Report*, 2023.

⁸ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Ghana Country Report 2022*.

⁹ Ghana Statistical Service, *Multidimensional Poverty – Ghana*, 2020.

¹⁰ USAID’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) for Ghana for 2020-2025 identifies accelerating development in northern Ghana as one of three development objectives. USAID, *Ghana CDCS 2020-2025*, 2020.

¹¹ Akufo-Addo won reelection in December 2020, in a rematch with former President John Mahama of the NDC, whom Akufo-Addo defeated in 2016. European Union (EU) observers found the elections generally credible and transparent, though five people reportedly died in election-related violence. EU Election Observation Mission, *Final Report: Ghana, Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, 7 December 2020*, 2021.

¹² *Inaugural Address by the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo*, January 7, 2021; *Message on the State of the Nation by the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo*, March 30, 2021.

realizing a “Ghana Beyond Aid,” entailing structural economic reforms and a “change in mindset and attitudes” aimed at reducing Ghana’s reliance on donor assistance.¹³

The Akufo-Addo administration tapped debt markets to finance its agenda, leading to an increase in Ghana’s debt burden even before the economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a surge in deficit spending. The ensuing economic crisis (see “The Economy and Development Issues”) has forced the government to cut spending, dimming prospects for its social programs. President Akufo-Addo has also struggled to advance parts of his agenda in Parliament, where his NPP holds a one-seat advantage over the opposition NDC (138 of 275 seats). Notably, NDC resistance to a new “e-levy” on electronic transactions—a centerpiece of Akufo-Addo’s efforts to raise tax revenues—delayed the levy’s implementation and pressured the NPP to lower the levy rate, causing the government to miss revenue targets in 2022. Surveys suggest widespread disapproval of the e-levy, which the government has lowered further in 2023.¹⁴

Public discontent with economic hardship and alleged poor governance has spurred protests and labor unrest. In 2021, thousands protested in Accra over poor living conditions, corruption, power and water shortages, and unemployment. An 2022 survey by Afrobarometer, a nongovernmental polling organization based in Accra, found that nearly 9 in 10 Ghanaians assessed that the country was heading in the wrong direction, and that a large majority stated that the government was performing poorly in economic affairs.¹⁵ Anger over the cost of living prompted further protests in June and November 2022. How the government continues to manage dissatisfaction with a struggling economy, while navigating parliamentary gridlock, may shape the NPP’s fortunes in the next presidential and parliamentary elections, due in 2024.

Foreign Relations

President Akufo-Addo has called for sweeping action to alleviate the debt burdens of African countries and restructure global capital markets to facilitate greater access to financing among African borrowers.¹⁶ He also has been an outspoken advocate for much greater investment from Western countries to support climate change adaptation in Africa.¹⁷

Russia. President Akufo-Addo has been critical of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and has blamed the impacts of the war on global food and fuel prices for harming Ghana’s economic outlook.¹⁸ A non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) through 2023, Ghana voted in favor of a UNSC resolution in February 2022 to condemn Russia’s aggression. Russia vetoed the measure. Ghana has since voted in favor of four U.S.-backed UNGA resolutions related to the war, but (like many African countries) abstained from an UNGA resolution suspending Russia from the UN Human Rights Council.¹⁹ President Akufo-Addo also has expressed concern over the role of Russian private military contractor the Wagner Group in Africa, and in December 2022

¹³ See, for instance, Government of Ghana, *Ghana Beyond Aid (GBA) Charter and Strategy Document*, April 2019.

¹⁴ Afrobarometer, “Majority of Ghanaians oppose e-levy, not confident it will fund development programmes, new Afrobarometer study shows,” July 13, 2022.

¹⁵ Afrobarometer, “Ghanaians bemoan economic conditions, say country is heading in the wrong direction, new Afrobarometer study shows,” July 19, 2022.

¹⁶ See, e.g., *Remarks by the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, at the 2022 Annual Meetings of the African Development Bank*, May 24, 2022.

¹⁷ Al Jazeera, “‘Not fair’: Ghana slams West over low funding for climate change,” October 11, 2022.

¹⁸ *Message on the State of the Nation by the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo*.

¹⁹ Specifically, Ghana voted in favor of UNGA Resolutions ES-11/1, ES-11/2, ES-11/4, and ES-11/5, and abstained from UNGA Resolution ES-11/3.

publicly accused neighboring Burkina Faso of hiring “Russian mercenaries.”²⁰ Burkinabe authorities denied the allegation and summoned Ghana’s ambassador over the claim.

China. The People’s Republic of China (PRC, or China) is one of Ghana’s top trade partners, and PRC entities have financed several infrastructure developments in the country. These include one of Ghana’s largest hydroelectric dams, several other power projects, and various transportation and communications investments.²¹ Certain projects have been financed through resource-backed loans, in which financing has been repaid or collateralized via sales of natural resources.

Ghanaian public opinion toward the growing role of the PRC appears divided. Some Ghanaians have described China’s involvement in Ghana’s economy as unfavorable to Ghana, or expressed concern over the environmental impacts of PRC-financed projects.²² The involvement of PRC nationals in illegal gold mining, a practice known locally as *galamsey*, has been a focus of public criticism and press coverage, as Ghanaian authorities have arrested hundreds of PRC nationals for *galamsey* in the past decade. According to a 2022 Freedom House report, “public opinion on China has increasingly turned negative over the *galamsey* problem,” though “most Ghanaians are not overly critical toward the Chinese government and instead hold the Ghanaian government primarily responsible.”²³ Observers also have accused PRC companies of extensive involvement in illicit fishing in Ghana, which is a top flag state for PRC distant-water fishing operations (see **Text Box**). Afrobarometer polling in 34 African countries suggests that Ghana was one of only six countries where positive perceptions of China significantly increased between 2014 and 2021, but that more Ghanaians still prefer the influence and development model of the United States.²⁴

Chinese Involvement in Ghana’s Fishing Sector:

Ghana’s Fisheries Act of 2002 prohibits foreign vessel ownership or foreign participation in joint ventures in most industrial fishing operations. Nonetheless, PRC nationals are reportedly extensively involved in Ghana’s fishing sector via joint ventures and beneficial ownership arrangements, although a lack of transparency regarding vessel ownership complicates definitive assessments of PRC fishing operations in the country. According to a 2018 study by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), a nongovernmental research and advocacy organization, “up to 90-95% of Ghana’s trawl fleet may have some Chinese involvement,” with ships flagged to Ghana but beneficially owned by PRC-based companies.²⁵ Ghana is also a centerpiece of China’s distant-water fishing (DWF) operations: the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a UK-based think tank, assessed in 2020 that, after China, Ghana is the leading flag state globally for PRC DWF vessels.²⁶

Human rights and environmental advocacy organizations have accused the PRC DWF fleet in Ghana of exploitative fishing practices, overfishing and ecological unsustainability, and labor abuses. A 2022 EJF study found that Ghana had recorded the highest number of IUU fishing offenses by PRC DWF vessels in West Africa from 2015-2019—a period during which, as a region, West Africa ranked as the top site of IUU incidents involving PRC DWF vessels globally.²⁷ Of particular concern in Ghana has been the reported involvement by PRC-owned

²⁰ BBC, “Wagner Group: Burkina Faso anger over Russian mercenary link,” December 16, 2022.

²¹ For a list of Chinese-funded projects in Ghana, see Boston University Global Development Policy Center, “Chinese Loans to Africa Database,” at <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/chinese-loans-to-africa-database/>.

²² Stacey Knott, “Mining Ghana’s bauxite would bring in billions from China. But it could also taint the water for 5 million people.” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2019; Amodani Gariba, “The \$19 billion Ghana-China deal does not serve Ghana’s interest; review it,” *Ghana Web*, September 5, 2018.

²³ Freedom House, *Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022: Ghana*, 2022.

²⁴ Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Edem Selorme, “Africans welcome China’s influence but maintain democratic aspirations,” Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 489, November 15, 2021.

²⁵ EJF, *China’s Hidden Fleet in West Africa: A Spotlight on Illegal Practices within Ghana’s Industrial Trawl Sector*, 2018, p. 4.

²⁶ Miren Gutiérrez et al., *China’s Distant-Water Fishing Fleet: Scale, Impact, and Governance*, ODI, 2020.

²⁷ EJF, *The Ever-Widening Net: Mapping the Scale, Nature, and Corporate Structures of Illegal, Unreported and*

trawlers in a practice known as *saiko*, entailing the capture of small pelagic fish—critical for fisheries sustainability, artisanal fishing livelihoods, and local food security—and the illicit transshipment of this bycatch to traders for sale onshore.²⁸ EJF also has alleged widespread human rights abuses onboard PRC-owned trawlers in Ghana, including physical abuse, overworking, low and irregular pay, insufficient and poor quality food, and lack of medical care.²⁹

Governance and Human Rights Issues

Successive Ghanaian governments have broadly respected freedoms of association, assembly, and expression. The country’s civil society is robust and diverse, nongovernmental organizations are generally at liberty to operate, and political commentators and opposition politicians routinely criticize and make demands of the government. As noted above, Ghana’s state administrative apparatus is more capable than those of many other countries in West Africa, albeit with generally better service provision in the south compared to the north, and in cities as opposed to rural areas.

Official corruption has nonetheless been a chronic problem, and a source of public discontent and target of investigative reporting. Several high-level officials have been implicated in corrupt practices. In late 2022, for instance, President Akufo-Addo fired his deputy finance minister after an undercover journalist filmed him soliciting bribes from investors. Extortion and bribe-taking by police and other justice sector officials is reportedly pervasive; according to public opinion surveys, nearly three in five Ghanaians believe “most” or “all” police are corrupt.³⁰

Attacks on journalists and press freedom have become increasingly prevalent in Ghana, which fell 30 places between the 2021 and 2022 editions of Reporters Without Borders’ *Press Freedom Index*, to 60 out of 180 countries. The State Department has documented “isolated attacks on and harassment and arrests of journalists by members of security forces” as well as violence toward media personnel by political party supporters and unknown assailants.³¹ Some politicians have threatened and harassed journalists, including those who report on corruption and other sensitive topics. In a prominent example, in 2019, assailants killed investigative journalist Ahmed Hussein-Suale; prior to the killing, an NPP Member of Parliament publicized Hussein-Suale’s name, called for his attack, and offered to pay for “whatever happens.”³² The killing remains unsolved.

Human rights groups also have raised concern over increasing attacks and harassment targeting LGBTQI+ people in Ghana. Activists partly attribute the rise to the introduction of a draft bill in Ghana’s parliament in 2021 that, if enacted, would be among the most restrictive bills globally related to LGBTQI+ identity (see **Text Box**).³³ Police have arrested LGBTQI+ individuals and raided gathering spaces for the LGBTQI+ community. The State Department also reports that “attacks by private citizens on LGBTQI+ persons were common and growing in number” in

Unregulated Fishing by the Chinese Distant-Water Fleet, 2022.

²⁸ Lieven Engelen, “Under cover of darkness: the damaging effects of illegal ‘saiko’ fishing,” *The Guardian*, October 17, 2022; EJF, *Stolen at Sea: How Illegal ‘Saiko’ Fishing is Fuelling the Collapse of Ghana’s Fisheries*, 2019.

²⁹ EJF, *Fear, Hunger, and Violence: Human Rights in Ghana’s Industrial Trawl Fleet*, 2021.

³⁰ Afrobarometer, Round 8 Surveys (2019). A 2021 survey by the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that over half of respondents who had had contact with police officers in the year prior to the survey had paid a bribe or been asked to pay a bribe (UNODC, *Corruption in Ghana: People’s Experiences and Views*, 2022).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Joel Gunter, “Murder in Accra: The life and death of Ahmed Hussein-Suale,” *BBC*, January 30, 2019.

³³ CRS interviews in Accra, Ghana, September 2023.

2021-2022, amid a “notable increase in anti-LGBTQI+ statements by high-ranking political figures and by religious and community leaders.”³⁴

Ghana’s Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill

In mid-2021, eight (mostly opposition) Members of Parliament introduced a bill that would dramatically expand penalties for being non-heterosexual. Ghanaian law already criminalizes “unnatural carnal knowledge,” understood to include same-sex relations, as a misdemeanor punishable by up to three years in prison. The draft “Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill” would make identification as a non-heterosexual person (broadly defined), engaging in same-sex intercourse, or identification as an ally of “the queer community” a felony punishable by three to five years in prison.³⁵ Any association that advocated on behalf of LGBTQI+ people would be disbanded; participation in such groups would henceforth be punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Advocacy found to promote non-heterosexual identity or activity could also result in a 10-year prison sentence.

In public remarks during Vice President Kamala Harris’ visit to Ghana in March 2023 (discussed below), President Akufo-Addo stated that the Attorney General had consulted with the Parliament regarding the constitutionality of several provisions of the bill, and indicated that “substantial elements of the bill have already been modified as a result of the intervention of the Attorney General.”³⁶ As of April 2023, the draft bill remained in committee.

Child labor in the Ghanaian and Ivoirian cocoa sectors has been an enduring problem and area of congressional engagement. The practice primarily involves the employment of children on farms owned by relatives, often under hazardous working conditions. Forced child labor, in which children are made to work by someone other than a relative, also occurs, but to a much more limited extent.³⁷ Under the 2001 Harkin-Engel Protocol, a voluntary public-private commitment witnessed by then-Representative Eliot Engel and then-Senators Tom Harkin and Herbert Kohl, major U.S. and European cocoa and chocolate industries committed to eradicating the “worst forms of child labor” in their supply chains.³⁸ The Protocol expired in 2021 after agreed benchmarks and deadlines for action were repeatedly altered, and child labor reportedly remains widespread in the industry.³⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) continues to administer aid to strengthen state responses to child labor and improve child welfare. The State Department, in its 2022 *Trafficking in Persons* report, classified Ghana as a Tier 2 country, meaning it does not meet minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so.

The Economy and Development Issues

Ghana’s economy is more diverse than many in West Africa. Since the mid-2000s, the services sector has rapidly expanded as a share of gross domestic product (GDP), driven by growth in the banking, tourism, transportation, and information and communications technology industries. Agriculture’s share of GDP has steadily declined since the 1980s but it is still a major employer,

³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 2023.

³⁵ The draft bill is available on the Parliament of Ghana’s website at <https://www.parliament.gh/docs?type=Bills&OT>.

³⁶ Nimi Princewill, “Ghana’s president softens country’s stance on draconian anti-LGBTQ bill as Kamala Harris visits,” *CNN*, March 29, 2023.

³⁷ A 2018 study by Tulane University and the Walk Free Foundation, an anti-slavery initiative, estimated that 15,200 children aged 10-17 and 3,700 adults had experienced forced labor in the Ghanaian cocoa sector between 2013 and 2017, out of 708,000 children and 1.1 million adults working in surveyed areas. Elke de Buhr and Elise Gordon, *Bitter Sweets: Prevalence of forced labour and child labour in the cocoa growing sectors of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana*, 2018.

³⁸ The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines the “worst forms” of child labor to include forced or sexually exploitative labor, the use of children in illicit activities, and hazardous work.

³⁹ In 2020, Chicago University researchers estimated that there were roughly 766,000 children engaged in child labor in cocoa-growing areas of Ghana, including 713,000 in hazardous work. NORC at the University of Chicago, *Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana*, 2020.

second to the services industry.⁴⁰ Cocoa is the most important export crop, accounting for 19% of merchandise exports in 2021, and is an important source of jobs; Ghana is the world's second-largest cocoa exporter behind neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, accounting for some 20% of annual global production. Gold and crude oil, however, each contribute larger shares of exports than cocoa, accounting for 34% and 27% of export earnings, respectively, in 2021.⁴¹

The economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted a period of strong growth, and the country's debt burden swelled as the Akufo-Addo administration increased borrowing to finance emergency support to cushion the economy.⁴² Ghana was effectively shut out of international debt markets by late 2022 as rating agencies downgraded its sovereign bonds to highly speculative status, and the government suspended payment of most external debts in December 2022. A debt swap with domestic creditors, who reportedly hold about one-third of the country's debt, closed in January 2023.⁴³ Negotiations among Ghana's bilateral creditors over external debt relief were ongoing as of mid-April 2023. Ghanaian authorities and U.S. and European diplomats have appeared to criticize China, Ghana's largest bilateral lender, for holding up bilateral debt talks.⁴⁴

The IMF has stated that financing assurances from Ghana's bilateral creditors are necessary to unlock a \$3 billion loan arrangement tentatively agreed to in December 2022.⁴⁵ The pending IMF program, Ghana's 17th IMF arrangement since the 1960s, is likely to focus on fiscal consolidation and improving debt sustainability and to require fiscal belt-tightening measures, such as spending cuts and tax increases, that may prove politically challenging to implement.

A spike in food and fuel prices in 2022, due in part to Russia's war in Ukraine, sharply eroded local purchasing power. Consumer inflation reached 54% in December 2022, the highest level in decades, propelled by a rapid depreciation of Ghana's currency, the *cedi*, which was among the worst performing currencies globally last year.⁴⁶ Inflation has eased since January 2023 as food and fuel prices have fallen.⁴⁷ As noted above, discontent over the rising cost of living resulted in street protests in 2022. In response to planned strikes by teachers, health sector workers, and other public-sector employees, the government increased salaries and cost of living allowances for civil servants and exempted pensions from its domestic debt-swap program.

Ghana has recorded a generally positive development trajectory, including a sustained, if slowing, reduction in poverty rates since 2005; the World Bank estimates that 10.2% of Ghanaians live on

⁴⁰ According to World Bank estimates, the share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing in Ghana's GDP declined from 60% in 1983 to 20% in 2021. World Bank, *World Development Indicators* database, accessed December 7, 2022.

⁴¹ Bank of Ghana, *Annual Report and Financial Statements 2021, 2022*.

⁴² As of April 2023, the IMF estimated Ghana's gross government debt-to-GDP ratio at 99%, up from 58% shortly before the onset of COVID-19. IMF, *World Economic Outlook* database, April 2023 update.

⁴³ Christian Akorlie, "Ghana says domestic debt swap closed with 85% participation," Reuters, February 15, 2023.

⁴⁴ Treasury Department, "Remarks by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen at Press Conference as Part of 2023 IMF-World Bank Annual Spring Meetings," April 11, 2023; Christian Akorlie and Cooper Inveen, "China must join Ghana debt restructuring effort soon, Germany's Lindner says," Reuters, February 4, 2023; Andrea Shalal, "Georgieva says she told China to 'speed up' work on debt restructuring," Reuters, April 6, 2023.

⁴⁵ IMF, "Key Questions on Ghana," updated December 13, 2022. The Akufo-Addo administration's decision to pursue IMF support represented an about-face for an administration that had previously sworn off IMF assistance, describing the need for IMF loans as a symptom of fiscal indiscipline; see, for instance, Ghana Presidency, "Ghana: 'Let Mahama's IMF Deal Be the Last' - President Akufo-Addo to Ghanaians," March 31, 2019.

⁴⁶ Ekow Dontoh and Moses Mozart Dzawu, "Ghana Inflation Exceeds 37% as Data Compilation Is Changed," *Bloomberg*, October 12, 2022.

⁴⁷ Ekow Dontoh, "Ghana Inflation Falls More Than Estimates on Lower Fuel, Food Costs," *Bloomberg*, April 12, 2023.

less than \$1.90 per day, below poverty levels in many other West African countries.⁴⁸ Ghana’s literacy rates, estimated at 79% (84% for men, 75% for women) are higher than in many other African countries, as are its average life expectancy at birth (69 years) and rates of access to improved water and sanitation facilities—notwithstanding disparities between north and south and rural and urban areas.⁴⁹ Ghana ranked as a “medium human development” country on the U.N. Development Program’s *Human Development Report 2021/2022*, placing 133 out of 191 countries, seventh in sub-Saharan Africa and slightly behind India.⁵⁰

Ghana relies on hydropower and thermal energy to meet most of its energy needs. Costly and unreliable electricity access has been a barrier to economic growth: Ghana’s energy sector has faced recurrent electricity supply crises (both shortfalls and gluts), and is a major source of public debt. Improving power distribution was the focus of Ghana’s second MCC compact, which closed in 2022 (see “Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Engagement”). According to the State Department, other business climate challenges include costly financial services, cumbersome bureaucracy, complicated land tenure systems, poor infrastructure, and corruption.⁵¹ Researchers have assessed that Ghana is at severe risk of the impacts of climate change (see **Text Box**).

Climate Risks and Vulnerabilities in Ghana

According to the World Bank, “Ghana is vulnerable to increasing aridity, droughts and extreme rainfall events and flooding, and faces significant challenges from a changing climate [...] to its ecology, economy, and society.”⁵² In the south, Accra and other fast-growing coastal cities face a number of risks associated with rising sea levels, such as flooding, damage to infrastructure, coastal erosion and environmental degradation, and heightened exposure to waterborne public health threats.⁵³ Many urban areas are highly informal, with poor infrastructure and low access to public services, making them particularly vulnerable to natural disasters.⁵⁴ Ghana’s north, where grasslands and dispersed tree-cover ecosystems transition into the southern edge of the Sahel, is at elevated risk of both drought and flooding. As much of Ghana’s agricultural activity is rain-fed, an increase in precipitation variability or the intensity of rainfall events may negatively affect food production and local livelihoods.

In remarks at the 27th U.N. Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP27), President Akufo-Addo called on developed countries to follow up on a pledge made at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15, held in 2009), to mobilize \$100 billion per year for climate-related action in the developing world.⁵⁵ He also referred to “loss and damage” funding to support countries facing adverse effects of climate change as “payment overdue” by “the rich and polluting nations,” and reiterated calls for a restructuring of the global financial system.⁵⁶

According to several studies, Ghanaian women face multiple overlapping barriers to political and economic inclusion. The constitution and other laws prohibit sex-based discrimination, yet—as in

⁴⁸ World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook: Ghana*, April 2021.

⁴⁹ CIA World Factbook, accessed November 15, 2022.

⁵⁰ U.N. Development Program, *Human Development Report 2021/2022: Uncertain Times, Unsettles Lives; Shaping our Future in a Transforming World*, 2022.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *2022 Investment Climate Statements: Ghana*, 2022.

⁵² World Bank, *Climate Risk Country Profile: Ghana*, 2021, p. 11, at https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/15857-WB_Ghana%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf.

⁵³ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Rising Sea Levels Besieging Africa’s Booming Coastal Cities,” November 8, 2022.

⁵⁴ Louise Fox and Danielle Resnick, “Africa’s informal cities need more than green infrastructure to weather the effects of climate change,” Brookings, November 14, 2022.

⁵⁵ National Statement by President Akufo-Addo at the COP27 World Leaders’ Summit, November 8, 2022, at <https://unfccc.int/documents/623325>.

⁵⁶ Statement by President Akufo-Addo at the COP27 Climate Prosperity Plans Flagship Event, at <https://thecvf.org/statement-for-cpp-flagship-event-akufo-addo>.

many countries globally—prevailing gender norms that emphasize women’s roles in the home (as mothers and wives) result in de facto impediments to gender equity.⁵⁷ Chiefs and other traditional leaders, who are predominately male and who regulate access to land in their respective areas of authority, tend to restrict women’s control over land, making it more difficult for women to obtain credit, increase their earnings, and adapt to shocks.⁵⁸ Women often lose access to land and other property in the event of divorce or the death of their spouse, owing to customary land tenure arrangements that favor male control and inheritance of assets.⁵⁹ Gender-based violence is widespread, and domestic violence is reportedly socially permissible in many communities.⁶⁰

Security Issues

Ghana has earned a reputation as an island of stability in a sub-region in which multiple countries have faced military coups, internal conflict, and rising Islamist violent extremism. Ghana has never experienced a civil war, and it ranks among the top ten contributors of military and police personnel to U.N. peacekeeping missions.⁶¹ In the 2022 *Global Peace Index*, an assessment of countries’ peacefulness based on measures of conflict, social harmony, and defense expenditures and capabilities, Ghana ranked 40th globally and 2nd in sub-Saharan Africa, behind Mauritius.⁶²

Ghana has not confirmed an extremist attack on its soil to date, but Ghanaian authorities have voiced concern over the southward expansion of Islamist extremist activity from Burkina Faso and the wider Sahel region.⁶³ Burkina Faso-based armed groups have launched attacks in neighboring Côte d’Ivoire and Togo, and in Benin. In February 2023, unknown actors attempted to bomb a bridge in Bawku, near the Burkina Faso border, and in March 2023, gunmen killed one immigration officer and injured two others in Bawku. Ghanaian security authorities attributed the incidents to criminals, without explicitly linking them to extremist organizations; in March 2023, President Akufo-Addo stated that he “did not have any information” confirming the presence of Al Qaeda in Ghana, but that it was possible that cells are operating clandestinely in the country.⁶⁴

Analysts warn that extremists may seek to expand their presence in northern Ghana by exploiting local grievances, especially among ethnic Fulani, a predominately Muslim group present in many West and Central African countries. Many Ghanaians consider Fulani to be foreigners regardless of, in some cases, multi-generational length of residency in Ghana, resulting in social and legal discrimination. Interethnic ties reportedly have eroded as non-Fulani have accused Fulani of criminality, contributing to retaliatory violence along ethnic lines.⁶⁵ Local chieftaincy disputes, which the State Department attributes to “the lack of a clear chain of succession, competing

⁵⁷ Banyan Global (produced for USAID/Ghana), *Gender Analysis Report*, 2020, pp. 11-15.

⁵⁸ Women and Girls Empowered Consortium, *Preliminary Gender and Inclusion Analysis for Ghana*, 2022, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ ActionAid, *Falling Through the Cracks: Tackling the Justice Deficit for Women Survivors in Ghana*, 2019.

⁶¹ Ghanaian personnel in U.N. peacekeeping efforts are largely deployed as part of the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and the U.N. Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).

⁶² Institute for Economics and Peace, *2022 Global Peace Index*, 2022.

⁶³ Kent Mensah, “West African Leaders Seek Solutions to Curb Terrorism from Sahel Region,” *Voice of America*, November 22, 2022.

⁶⁴ C-Span, “Vice President Harris and Ghanaian President Akufo-Addo Joint News Conference,” March 27, 2023, at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?526975-101/vice-president-harris-ghanaian-president-hold-joint-news-conference>.

⁶⁵ James Courtright, “In Ghana, Local Problems Threaten Regional Security,” *Institute of Current World Affairs*, July 22, 2022. On risks of extremist violence in Ghana more generally, see Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, *The Jihadist Threat in Northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and Prospects for Containing the Expansion*, 2022.

claims regarding land and other natural resources, and internal rivalries and feuds,” also have spurred conflict and may offer a pretext for extremist expansion. Notably, an ongoing chieftaincy dispute in Bawku has killed dozens of people since a resumption of hostilities in 2021.⁶⁶

The Gulf of Guinea, to Ghana’s south, ranks among the world’s most insecure waters for piracy and other forms of maritime criminality, such as narcotics trafficking. The State Department reports that “Ghana is a transit point for illicit drugs trafficked from Asia and South America to other African nations, Europe, and to a lesser extent the United States.”⁶⁷

U.S. Relations and Assistance

U.S.-Ghana ties are close, partly rooted in Ghana’s reputation as a democratic leader and pillar of stability in Africa. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama each visited Ghana during their tenures, and in 2019, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi led a congressional delegation to Ghana to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to what is now the United States. Vice President Kamala Harris visited Ghana in March 2023 in a trip that highlighted cooperation in security, education, commerce, and creative industries (see **Text Box**).

Vice President Harris’ March 2023 Visit to Ghana

Vice President Harris and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff visited Ghana from March 26-29, the first leg of a three-country tour of Africa that also included Tanzania and Zambia. Vice President Harris met with President Akufo-Addo on March 27; according to an official readout, the Vice President applauded Akufo-Addo for Ghana’s activity in the U.N. related to the Russia-Ukraine war and “steadfast leadership to defend and advance democracy in West Africa,” among other issues.⁶⁸ After the meeting, Vice President Harris pledged \$100 million to support conflict prevention and stabilization in coastal West Africa under the Global Fragility Act (discussed below).⁶⁹

The Vice President’s trip also included a visit to a skate park and recording studio; a state dinner with President Akufo-Addo, Ghana’s First Lady, and American and Ghanaian artists, activists, and scholars; and remarks at Black Star Gate, a national landmark, focused on youth, technological innovation, and women’s empowerment, among other themes.⁷⁰ Toward the end of her visit, she toured Cape Coast Castle, one of several historic sites in Ghana related to the transatlantic slave trade (see next text box), and led a roundtable with women entrepreneurs in which she highlighted the Biden Administration’s new and ongoing initiatives related to women’s empowerment.⁷¹

Ghana is a hub for U.S. engagement in the wider sub-region: the country hosts the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) West Africa regional mission, one of four U.S. Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Regional Leadership Centers in Africa, and one of two State Department International Law Enforcement Academies on the continent. Bilateral relations also include the U.S.-Ghana Business Forum, a regular exchange between U.S. and Ghanaian officials

⁶⁶ James Courtright, “A Small Town in Ghana Erupted in Violence. Were Jihadists Fueling the Fight?” *New Lines Magazine*, January 25, 2023.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2022, Volume 1: Drug and Chemical Control*, 2022.

⁶⁸ White House, “Readout of Vice President Kamala Harris’s Meeting with President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana,” March 27, 2023.

⁶⁹ White House, “Fact Sheet: Vice President Harris Announces Initiatives to Strengthen U.S. Partnership with Ghana and Promote Regional Security,” March 27, 2023. The entire press conference can be viewed at C-Span, “Vice President Harris and Ghanaian President Akufo-Addo Joint News Conference,” March 27, 2023.

⁷⁰ White House, “Remarks by Vice President Harris During Visit to Vibrate Studio,” March 27, 2023; and “Remarks by Vice President Harris to Ghanaian Youth at Black Star Gate,” March 28, 2023.

⁷¹ White House, “Remarks by Vice President Harris at Cape Coast Castle,” March 28, 2023; and “Remarks by Vice President Harris at Roundtable Discussion with Women Entrepreneurs” and “Fact Sheet: Vice President Harris Launches Global Initiatives on the Economic Empowerment of Women, Totaling over \$1 Billion,” March 29, 2023.

and business leaders focused on deepening commercial engagement. The two countries signed an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation in 2021, and in late 2022, the United States, Ghana, and Japan announced a “strategic collaboration” to support Ghana’s nuclear power program.⁷²

People-to-people and cultural ties also are robust. There is a sizable Ghanaian diaspora in the United States—with larger communities in the New York City, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta metropolitan areas—and several thousand U.S. citizens reside in Ghana.⁷³ The Akufo-Addo administration has expanded efforts to attract tourism and migration to Ghana by Black Americans, partly premised on the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade (see **Text Box**).

U.S. Heritage Tourism and Migration to Ghana

Present-day Ghana was a source and transit point for enslaved people trafficked to the Americas as part of the transatlantic slave trade, which endured from the 16th to the 19th century.⁷⁴ The country’s coastline is dotted with dozens of “slave castles,” forts built by European traders that were used to house enslaved people prior to the Atlantic crossing. Today, these forts are prominent heritage sites and tourist destinations; Members of Congress and other U.S. officials often visit slave castles as part of delegations to the country.

In 2019, the Akufo-Addo administration launched the “Year of Return,” a campaign to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans to what is now the United States by encouraging members of the African diaspora (especially Black Americans) to visit, migrate to, and invest in Ghana. A number of celebrities visited Ghana during the year; President Akufo-Addo conferred citizenship on dozens of diaspora members resident in the country. There are no official, publicly available statistics on the number of diaspora members who relocated to Ghana during the Year of Return, or who have stayed. Akufo-Addo subsequently announced “Beyond the Return,” a ten-year initiative to continue to attract heritage-based tourism, migration, and foreign investment.

U.S.-Ghana Trade and Investment

Ghana is a minor U.S. trade and investment partner in global terms, but is a leading source and destination market for U.S. trade in Africa and a top regional destination for U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI). U.S. imports from Ghana in 2021 were valued at \$1.72 billion; mineral fuels accounted for nearly 80% of this total (\$1.34 billion), with cocoa comprising much of the balance (\$219 million).⁷⁵ U.S. exports to Ghana in 2021 totaled roughly \$960 million in value; motor vehicles and auto parts (\$328 million), machinery (\$108 million), meat and poultry (\$93 million), and plastics (\$85 million) were the leading U.S. export categories in 2021.⁷⁶ Ghana is eligible for duty-free trade benefits under the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, P.L. 106-200, as amended). Mineral fuels were the top category of U.S. AGOA imports from Ghana in 2021.

According to the State Department, “roughly 100 U.S. companies maintain operations in Ghana,” including U.S. multinationals Coca Cola, Cargill, Newmont (a gold mining company), IBM, and PwC.⁷⁷ In 2021, ExxonMobil surrendered its 80% stake in a deep-water oil prospect after a 2.5-

⁷² U.S. Department of State, “The United States of America and Republic of Ghana Sign a Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Strategic Civil Nuclear Cooperation,” (July 13, 2021) and “United States and Japan Announce Partnership with Ghana to Support its Goal of Being the Mover in Africa for Small Modular Reactor Deployment” (October 26, 2022).

⁷³ CRS tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. CRS Research Assistant Isobel Sorenson assisted in collecting and analyzing U.S. Census Bureau data.

⁷⁴ During this period, Europeans referred to Ghana—initially the coastal region, and gradually the interior—as the “Gold Coast,” in reference to the gold reserves that had drawn Portuguese traders to the area in the late 15th century.

⁷⁵ CRS calculation based on data from USITC Dataweb, accessed November 29, 2022, at <https://dataweb.usitc.gov/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations With Ghana,” at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-ghana/>.

year period of exploration, exiting Ghana as part of the firm’s broader wind-down of operations in West Africa. U.S. oil and gas operator Kosmos Energy remains in the country’s energy sector, alongside Italian major Eni, Tullow Oil (UK), Vitol (Switzerland), and Aker Energy (Norway). In late 2022, Twitter inaugurated a headquarters in Accra, its first in Africa, but fired nearly all of its Ghana-based staff days later amid sweeping personnel changes following the company’s change in ownership. The terminated employees have alleged a breach of Ghana’s labor laws.⁷⁸

U.S. Assistance

U.S. assistance for Ghana is diverse, supporting a range of development, governance, and security programs. State Department- and USAID-administered aid totaled \$140.3 million in estimated allocations of FY2022 appropriations.⁷⁹ The Administration has proposed \$138.8 million for Ghana in its FY2024 budget request.

As with most other countries in Africa, health assistance is the largest category of U.S. assistance for Ghana, with aid to combat malaria (Ghana is a President’s Malaria Initiative focus country); promote maternal, child, and reproductive health; improve water supply and sanitation; enhance nutrition; and strengthen health security, among other focus areas. Other U.S. development aid seeks to promote agricultural development (Ghana is one of 20 Feed the Future focus countries), improve basic education, support good governance, and strengthen civil society. As noted above, DOL administers U.S. aid to help eradicate child labor in the cocoa industry. As of April 2023, Ghana hosted 26 Peace Corps Volunteers supporting projects in agriculture, education, and health. State Department-administered security assistance for Ghana has included support for military professionalization, peacekeeping capacity-building, and law enforcement.

Countering violent extremism is an emergent focus of U.S.-Ghana security cooperation. As noted above, the Biden Administration has designated Ghana as a focus for engagement pursuant to the Global Fragility Act (GFA), as part of a “coastal West Africa” grouping that also includes Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, and Togo.⁸⁰ A 2021 coup in Guinea and U.S. concerns with undemocratic governance in Benin and Togo may elevate Ghana’s role within sub-regional engagement under the GFA. In March 2023, the Administration released a summary of its GFA sub-regional strategy, which states that U.S. engagement in coastal West Africa will aim to strengthen social cohesion, improve government responsiveness, inclusion, and accountability, and enhance security force effectiveness.⁸¹ An ongoing USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program also aims to build resilience to extremism in this coastal West Africa grouping; northern Ghana was selected as an initial focus area of OTI engagement.⁸² The State Department has additionally identified Ghana (alongside some other coastal West African countries) as a potential recipient of funds via the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and global counterterrorism programs.

Ghana’s military has received Department of Defense-administered training and equipment and regularly participates in U.S. regional military exercises. Ghana hosted Obangame Express, U.S.

⁷⁸ Larry Madowo, “Twitter Africa employees accuse Elon Musk of discrimination over severance terms,” *CNN*, November 22, 2022.

⁷⁹ This includes \$2.5 million in supplemental assistance provided in the Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-128). U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification for FY2024*, 2023.

⁸⁰ CRS Insight IN11938, *Responding to State “Fragility” in Coastal West Africa*, by Tomás F. Husted and Alexis Arieff.

⁸¹ State Department, “The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability 10-Year Strategic Plan for Coastal West Africa,” March 24, 2023.

⁸² Creative Associates, “The Littorals Regional Initiative,” accessed October 31, 2022.

Africa Command (AFRICOM's) premier maritime exercise in West Africa, in 2021, and in March 2023, it co-hosted Flintlock, AFRICOM's annual special operations exercise, with neighboring Côte d'Ivoire. A State Partnership Program between Ghana and North Dakota's National Guard, launched in 2004, has included joint exercises and trainings in medical readiness and disaster response. In 2018, the United States and Ghana signed an updated Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which governs defense cooperation and the rights of U.S. troops stationed in partner countries. Ratification of the SOFA proved controversial amid allegations by some Ghanaians that it would pave the way for a U.S. military base in Ghana, a claim the U.S. Embassy refuted.⁸³

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Engagement

Ghana has been the recipient of two MCC compacts. The first, implemented between 2007 and 2012 and valued at \$547 million, sought to reduce poverty among farmers with activities to support higher-value agricultural productivity, reduce costs related to agricultural commerce and transportation, and strengthen services in rural areas. The second, a power sector project focused on improving electricity supply, closed in June 2022. Ghana's second MCC compact was initially valued at \$498 million,⁸⁴ but the MCC announced in 2019 that it would withhold \$190 million in funding due to the Ghanaian government's termination of a concession between the state-owned electricity utility and a private firm—a precondition for the release of funds.⁸⁵ The compact continued at a reduced investment of \$308 million, subsequently increased to \$316 million to accommodate delays due to COVID-19. The compact entailed activities to enhance electricity distribution through infrastructure investments and other support, promote energy efficiency, expand access to reliable power, and strengthen Ghana's regulatory framework.⁸⁶

Outlook and Issues for Congress

A severe economic and fiscal crisis continues to cloud Ghana's outlook. Record-high inflation and runaway currency depreciation have gutted local purchasing power, and the Akufo-Addo administration defaulted on its external debt in December 2022. Price increases have eased in 2023, and Ghana has had success in restructuring its domestic and external debts, yet economic conditions remain stark. An anticipated IMF lending package may help to reassure creditors and restore stability, but it will also likely require the Akufo-Addo administration to undertake fiscal belt-tightening measures, such as spending cuts and tax hikes, that may prove politically costly.

A series of military takeovers in West Africa since 2020 and the spread of extremist violence from the neighboring Sahel has thrown into sharp relief Ghana's reputation as a leading democracy and bulwark of stability in the sub-region. U.S. engagement is likely to continue to reflect Ghana's standing as an island of good governance and stability in a turbulent neighborhood, amid rising extremist threats along Ghana's northern border. Funding and oversight of GFA assistance are possible avenues available to Congress to help shape, direct, and assess such engagement. The State Department's Office of Inspector General has previously documented shortcomings in the

⁸³ U.S. Embassy in Ghana, "Statement on Status of Forces Agreement," March 20, 2018.

⁸⁴ This does not include a \$37 million contribution from the government of Ghana.

⁸⁵ MCC, "Statement Regarding the Termination of the Private Sector Concession by the Government of Ghana," October 23, 2019.

⁸⁶ MCC, "Ghana Power Compact," at <https://www.mcc.gov/where-we-work/program/ghana-power-compact>.

planning and management of past influxes of U.S. security assistance for Ghana, which Congress might consider as it oversees a prospective surge in counterterrorism aid for the country.⁸⁷

Attacks on journalists and rising violence against LGBTQI+ individuals in Ghana have damaged the country's otherwise positive human rights record and may generate friction in the bilateral relationship. Congressional action related to international press freedom or LGBTQI+ rights issues may influence U.S.-Ghana relations, including by possibly providing new tools for the executive branch to apply in its promotion of global human rights. Ghanaian authorities and lawmakers, for their part, may bristle at any perceived foreign intrusion in domestic social issues.

Amid bipartisan congressional interest in the promotion of U.S. trade and investment ties with Africa, some Members may seek to assess what opportunities might exist for expanding U.S. economic relations with Ghana, a leading U.S. commercial partner in the region. Congress also might seek to examine how U.S. trade programs, such as AGOA, and development finance could help unlock greater bilateral trade and investment and improve Ghana's business climate. Some in Congress may also seek to compare the U.S. commercial presence in Ghana with that of China. The reportedly extensive involvement of Chinese nationals in Ghana's illicit economy (notably illegal mining and fishing) is another possible issue for Congress, in light of enduring congressional concern over malign activities by China and other global competitors in Africa.

Growing people-to-people and cultural ties may shape U.S. public commentary and congressional engagement related to Ghana. Few, if any, African countries have so successfully sought to attract heritage-based tourism and migration from the United States predicated on the legacies of the slave trade. Whether and how the Akufo-Addo administration and its successors are able to build on the upswing in U.S. public interest and travel to Ghana recorded during the 2019 "Year of Return"—and any associated implications for U.S.-Ghanaian ties—remains to be seen.

In considering this bilateral relationship and Ghana's role in the region, Members may consider various additional options to shape U.S.-Ghana policy and engagement. These might include:

- Conducting hearings, briefings, or fact-finding trips to examine issues in the U.S.-Ghana relationship. Issues of possible interest to Congress may include the implications of Ghana's economic crisis for its stability, governance trajectory, and U.S. commercial interests; the threat of extremism in Ghana; corruption and human rights challenges; and Ghana's ties with China and illicit activities by Chinese firms active in the country;
- Demonstrating concern or exercising oversight through correspondence with executive branch or Ghanaian officials, public statements, or resolutions or other legislation, or engagement via a new Congressional Ghana Caucus announced in late 2022;⁸⁸
- Considering changes to the level or scope of foreign assistance appropriations for Ghana, and overseeing implementation of U.S. assistance for the country.

⁸⁷ Ghana was previously one of six African partner countries under the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), a security-sector capacity building program launched by the Obama Administration. A 2017 audit of Embassy Accra by the U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General (State OIG) assessed that SGI programming in Ghana "lacked adequate direction and support" and found that an increase in U.S. security assistance for Ghana between FY2015 and FY2017 had strained embassy staffing and other resources, as "embassy staff were unable to effectively plan, synchronize, and implement this assistance." State OIG, *Inspection of Embassy Accra, Ghana*, June 2017.

⁸⁸ Politico, "Wild, wonderful and divided," September 21, 2022.

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