

# Press, Power & Politics

GHANA • 2000

A Freedom Forum report on the Ghanaian media.



PRESS, POWER & POLITICS

GHANA

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## FOREWORD

In the year 2000, The Freedom Forum embarked on a project to examine political coverage in several countries. The foundation organized global media forums on “Press, Power & Politics” in Ghana, Hong Kong, London and Peru.

In Accra, Ghana, the forum featured a debate between presidential candidates and discussions among journalists on a range of issues: political coverage, fairness, media ownership and technology.

As part of our project, we asked Kwame Karikari, a journalist and a scholar, to write a monograph on Ghana’s media. We’ve looked at the state of the media in Ghana, the role the media played in Ghana’s history and the coverage of the 2000 election.

The document was edited by Joan Mower, director of Africa and Latin America programs at The Freedom Forum in Arlington, Va. Jerelyn Eddings, director of The Freedom Forum’s African Center, was also involved in the project.

Chris Wells  
Senior Vice President/International  
The Freedom Forum



## INTRODUCTION

Ghanaians, known worldwide for their friendliness and hospitality — the country's national slogan is *akwabaa*, or *Welcome!* — elected John Kufuor president on December 28, 2000 in an election widely hailed as a triumph of democracy as well as a victory for the Ghana's news media, which covered the campaign intensely.

Kufuor, a 62-year-old lawyer representing the New Patriotic Party, defeated Vice President John Atta Mills, the hand-picked successor of former President Jerry John Rawlings, a former flight lieutenant who had dominated Ghana's political life since the late 1970s. Rawlings seized power twice in military coups and was elected twice as Ghana's president. He was barred from seeking a third term.

In the run-up to the election, international attention was focused on Ghana, its elections and its media. Would the media help cement democratic trends in Ghana by providing fair and accurate political coverage, or would those in power try to circumvent legitimacy?

The general consensus was that Ghana survived the test with flying colors, becoming one of the African nations that has seen a flowering of democratic values in a time of turmoil for much of the continent.

"The media played a very, very important role in the success of the elections," said Francis Tsegah, Ghana's acting ambassador in the United States.

"The Ghanaian news media reported closely and critically on the country's presidential elections, demonstrating anew the importance of independent-minded journalism to emergent democracies," said Dr. W. Joseph Campbell, a professor at American University who has studied media in Africa. "The news media in West Africa are not necessarily the vanguards of political change, but they can be vital in promoting respect and understanding for democratic values and practices. The Ghanaian print and broadcast media, on the whole, succeeded in fulfilling those roles.

"In doing so, they joined their counterparts in Benin, Senegal and Nigeria — other West African countries where an independent press has pro-

The media's most important role was also its most basic: disseminating information.

vided election coverage that proved important to sustaining and strengthening experiments in democratic governance.”

Frankie Asare-Donkoh, deputy general secretary of the Ghana Journalists Association, said the media’s most important role was disseminating information.

“Various media houses, both print and electronic, carried news stories, feature articles, documentaries, discussion programs to explain what elections meant to individuals and the nation,” he said.

“The backgrounds of the candidates were brought to the attention of the electorate and this helped people to make decisions,” he added.

In general, both the press and radio subjected candidates to critical assessments. The outlets published and broadcast voter educational programs and material. News, commentaries, analyses and features filled up the columns as discussions and call-in radio programs filled the airwaves.

The country’s independent FM radio stations were crucial. They opened their studios and telephone lines to debates and discussions with political candidates and government officials. They laid out party programs for discussion and analysis. On election day, the stations devoted round-the-clock coverage to election results, a trend many thought prevented cheating and controversy.

The state-owned public media worked hard to minimize bias for the incumbent government and its candidates. Journalists came up with guidelines for reporting elections fairly and for giving equal access to all the parties in the run-up to the elections as demanded by the country’s constitution. The channels of the national television and radio organization, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, provided free equal time slots for all the presidential candidates and other party campaign messages.

Officials of the National Electoral Commission praised the media for contributing to the success and legitimacy of the polls. The media were critical in ensuring the transparency of the elections.

Additionally, a presidential forum, organized by The Freedom Forum and broadcast live by Ghana Broadcasting Corporation on September 27, 2000 from Accra, was lauded as a positive development for the country and its media.

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“It might have lasted only two hours, but the debate that took place ... was a milestone in African politics,” wrote Daniel Brown in the *International Herald Tribune*. “For the first time, six of seven candidates of the opposition faced off in an American-style debate before a live television and radio audience of several million people. These politicians were unhindered by force or censorship as they laid out their political platforms...” Atta Mills was the only candidate who declined to appear.

Ghana has a diverse media. Radio is the dominant medium among the 19 million people, more than 35 percent of who can’t read or write. Wherever people work, eat, drink, play and relax, in the cities and in the rural areas, the upcoming election provokes lively debates.

Newspapers, which have been around in Ghana for nearly 180 years, play an important role, particularly among the urban elite. Both privately owned and state-run newspapers influence the political debate, but their impact is limited by the low literacy rate, the high price of a single-copy newspaper — about half or a third of the daily wage in a country where annual per capita income is about \$1,800 — and poor circulation. (In 1998, Ghana ranked 130<sup>th</sup> out of 191 countries in per capita income.)

Television, comprising the dominant state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and three small, independent operators, is not yet as lively a source of political debate as radio. Programs, which primarily reach only the English-speaking elite, often sound cautious and restrained.

Ghana’s media appears free and fair, with the independent press often taking partisan, anti-government stands and the state-owned media reporting thoroughly, though in a more muted voice, the ruling government’s activities. The 1992 Constitution requires “fair coverage” of and “equal access” to the political parties, but opposition party members have complained about bias, particularly from the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation.

George Benneh of the GBC board said the corporation lacks resources to cover political events as fully as it would like. And Godwin Avenorgbo, GBC’s director of radio, said that while the government guarantees fair access, “I would have been

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happier if the government had also guaranteed some resources to go into the field.”

Despite what appears to be an open climate for the media and the cacophony on the airwaves and the printed page, vigilance is a watchword for free press advocates who have spent much of the years since independence fighting for their rights.

Freedom House, a private New York foundation (no relation to The Freedom Forum), rated Ghana as having a press that was “not free” in its 1999 report on “Press Freedom Worldwide.” (Many Ghanaian journalists have challenged that assessment, which was made well before the election of President Kufuor.)

“Although the 1992 Constitution guarantees media freedom, the government legally circumvents it,” Freedom House said. “The privately owned press, still vigorous, was frequently victim of government crackdowns, and libel suits have increased in recent years.” Many libel laws have been on the books since colonial times.

The Committee to Protect Journalists said in its 1999 “Attacks on the Press” that Ghana had a “repressive legal climate” for journalists. More than 120 libel cases against Ghana’s independent press were pending in 1999, a year in which the twice-weekly *Ghanaian Chronicle* was fined nearly \$20,000 for libeling a minister of roads and transport. (President Kufuor has pledged to repeal the country’s criminal libel laws.) Other threats also exist.

Several journalists were arrested during the presidential campaign and a radio station was temporarily shut down. The Rawlings government closed Chris FM, a privately owned station in Berekum following allegations that a parliamentary candidate for the New Patriotic Party had used the station to incite his supporters. In addition, Kofi Coomson, publisher and editor of *Ghanaian Chronicle* was arrested and released on \$700 bail on November 6, 2000 on charges of possessing diskettes belonging to the National Democratic Congress.

Earlier in January 2000, Kabral Blay-Amihere, editor of *The Independent*, was arrested and held overnight by security forces after his weekly paper reported that military officials had refused to participate in a traditional march. Blay-Amihere is also pres-

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ident of the West African Journalists Association.

Press freedom turned into a diplomatic incident between Ghana and the United States in 1997. Nick Robertson, the U.S. Embassy's press officer, was expelled from the country because, Ghanaian officials said, his statements "bordered on interference." Robertson had criticized the law under which editors were charged with sedition.

And while Ghana's private radio broadcasting industry is thriving, it is in its infancy. The first privately owned radio station began broadcasting less than six years ago.

Despite threats, Ghana's vibrant media continue to report on sensitive issues, including the president's purchase of an airplane and the business activities of his wife, the Committee to Protect Journalists said. Government officials critical of the independent media say they distort facts and engage in irresponsible reporting.

The 1992 Constitution states that media are expected "to give fair and adequate opportunity for citizens to express their divergent views." The National Media Commission (NMC), the independent constitutional body responsible for protecting media freedom, published four non-binding sets of standards and guidelines in 2000, including "Guidelines for Political Reporting," "Broadcasting Standards" and "National Media Policy."

## SOCIETY AND HISTORY

Ghana is a young country and one of the more densely populated in West Africa, its 19 million people living in an area slightly smaller than Oregon. Its largest city is Accra, the capital, with about 1.5 million people, followed by Kumasi, the heart of the Ashanti region.

Climatically, the country falls into three zones — the lush coastal region, the central forest region and the dry north. Much of the country is flat or slightly hilly. The eastern part of the country is dominated by Lake Volta, the world's largest artificial lake. About 250 miles long and an average 15 miles wide, its waters cover an area nearly as large as Cyprus.

Farming is a mainstay of the economy in a

Ghana has diverse media. Radio is the dominant medium among its 19 million people.

country that is the world's second-largest cocoa producer after the Ivory Coast. But Ghana also has mining wealth — gold exports outpaced cocoa in the 1990s — and timber and fishing industries. Tourism is also playing an increasing role in the economy.

Ethnically, nearly half of Ghanaians — 44 percent — are Akan, a group that includes the Ashanti from the Kumasi area and the Fanti, who are fishermen and farmers from the central coast area. Other large ethnic groups include the Ga — indigenous people in the Accra and Tema areas — the Krobo and the Ewe. The Dagomba inhabit much of north-central Ghana.

Ghana has a rich artistic tradition. The brightly colored kente cloth of the Ashanti is world-famous as are the Ashanti's gold jewelry, carved stools and fertility dolls. Ghanaians' "highlife" pop music blares from radios across the country. Ghanaian food is also distinctive, with staples like fufu (mashed yams), abolo (steamed corn dough) and forowe (fish stew).

Christianity is the dominant religion, reaching about 44 percent of the citizens. About 35 percent of the people practice traditional ancestral religion, and the rest are Muslims.

The British established a legal colonial authority in Cape Coast in 1844. In 1902, after stiff resistance, the British defeated the Ashanti kingdom in the tropical rain forest. The rest of the northern sections in the Sahelian zone, which make up a third of the country's territory, were formally included under one central administration by 1910.

The colonial authorities governed the country exclusively until 1925 when chiefs from the coastal and southern provinces were given representation on the legislative council that administered the colony's internal affairs. After 1946, local representation was increased to include popularly elected members. The first general election based on universal adult suffrage was held in 1951 for a legislative assembly of 104 members. The first Ghanaian prime minister and his cabinet were appointed from this Parliament. The pre-independence compromise was called Internal Self Government.

The Convention People's Party (CPP, formed in 1949), dominated the 1951 elections, appealing to youth and women and organizing aggressively.

In 1957, Ghana became the first country in colonial Africa to gain independence.

Its leader was the legendary Kwame Nkrumah, a charismatic, America-educated (Lincoln University in Pennsylvania) intellectual whom the British jailed in 1949 for organizing a strike.

The CPP government had two principal policy hallmarks: It supported a united Africa, free from colonial rule, and rapid economic and social development of Ghana.

In 1957, Ghana became the first country in colonial Africa to gain independence. After this achievement, Nkrumah embraced socialism as his political and economic ideology. He embarked on a program of widespread infrastructure development, massive expansion of educational opportunities to all regions of the country and speedy industrialization. Within a short time, Ghana produced a large number of highly educated and skilled workers.

But Nkrumah's one-party regime ended in failure. He damaged the economy by creating unprofitable state-run enterprises, accumulated large debts, jailed hundreds of people without trial, restricted human rights and free speech, and created a private army. Food shortages occurred for the first time in 1964.

The Nkrumah government also incurred the hostility of Western powers as a result of its increasing alliance to the Soviet bloc and its radical Pan African policies. Its authoritarian controls alienated the public, and the economic difficulties undermined the people's appreciation of the country's social programs. In 1966, the Ghana army, backed by Western intelligence forces, overthrew the CPP government.

Nkrumah's socialist regime was replaced by a right-wing conservative military junta of senior officers. The next 16 years saw an economic decline as six governments, most of them incompetent and corrupt, tried to lead the country amid rampant inflation and declining production.

Another coup, this one led by Flight Lt. Rawlings, toppled the government in 1979. Three months later, Rawlings stepped down to allow civilian elections. But the economy continued its downward spiral under the civilian president, Hilla Limann, prompting Rawlings to stage another coup in 1981.

In 1992, voters approved ... a new constitution that promised ... more elaborate provisions for freedom of expression and media than any previous constitution had allowed.

As a military leader in the 1980s, Rawlings managed to gain control of the country's economy by, among other things, devaluing the currency and laying off nearly 30,000 government employees. The country's economic growth surged to about 5 percent a year, the highest in Africa, and by 1988 the government budget had a surplus.

Rawlings transformed his Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), the military regime that would rule longer than any other government in the country's history, into a political party, the National Democratic Congress. In 1992, voters elected Rawlings as president and approved a referendum for a new Constitution that promised liberal democratic institutions, guarantees of human rights and more elaborate provisions for freedom of expression and of the media than any previous constitution had allowed.

Rawlings won re-election in 1996 with 57 percent of the vote in a process generally viewed as free and fair. His major opponent, John Kufuor, garnered 39 percent of the vote. Despite Rawlings' successes, economic, social and political issues continue to dominate the agenda. Falling prices for raw materials have hurt Ghana's economy, which remains heavily dependent on international, financial and technical assistance. The depreciation of the cedi and rising unemployment have created discontent in a country where subsistence agriculture employs about 60 percent of the country.

## HISTORY OF THE PRESS

The British governor of a small colonial enclave around Cape Coast and Accra started the first newspaper in 1822. Called *Royal Gold Coast Gazette*, it was directed at the tiny community of Europeans — traders, soldiers, administrators and others. This first initiative survived only a few years. It was imported into the Gold Coast, the British name for the colony, from Sierra Leone where the same English colonial administrator, Charles McCarthy, had started a similar paper in 1801.

In 1857, Africans started the first Ghanaian-owned paper, *The West Africa Herald*, in Accra. For about a century, Ghanaian entrepreneurs and publishers dominated the newspaper business.

Christian missionaries also played an early role in the country's press. Church newspapers were important in winning souls, but were equally useful in promoting literacy. They also sometimes concerned themselves with secular political matters. Some of the newspapers of the traditional churches are still published today, though they have little influence outside of the chapels.

The Presbyterian *Christian Messenger*, published since 1883, is the longest continuous surviving newspaper in the country. It is also the first newspaper to have published in a Ghanaian language, starting its first edition with columns in Twi and Ga. The *Methodist Times* dates to 1874 and still publishes today, though intermittently. The Catholic-owned *Standard* started in the early 1900s and was very popular in the 1970s and 1980s when it wrote about the excesses of military dictatorships.

Another paper with a long and proud history is *The Pioneer* of Kumasi in the heart of the Ashanti kingdom. Founded in 1937 as the *Ashanti Pioneer*, its life sums up the checkered and battered history of the Ghanaian press. This paper, which became *The Pioneer* in 1968, has been censored and banned, its editors detained without trial or exiled. It has also faced its share of sedition and contempt prosecutions and libel suits.

The colonial government banned the paper briefly in 1950, at the height of nationalist movement, for publishing nationalist leader Nkrumah's photograph. Twelve years later, in an ironic twist that reflects the country's political ups and downs, the Nkrumah government censored the paper and then banned it under an emergency law that gave arbitrary powers to the president.

The editor of *The Pioneer* in the early 1960s, A.D. Appa, was the first journalist after independence to be detained without charge or trial under the notorious Preventive Detention Act of the Nkrumah government. Its first editor, Nortey Dowuona was the only journalist to have died as a result of a coup, though not for reasons of his work.

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On the morning of the coup to oust Nkrumah in 1966, Dowuona was shot by soldiers in front of the presidential residence, the Flagstaff House, behind the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, as he drove from the nearby Military Hospital.

Its vicissitudes notwithstanding, *The Pioneer's* contribution to the development of the profession has been remarkable. Though a provincial paper, it spawned many of the important journalists who from the mid-1950s and after independence managed and staffed the leading newspapers. Also, the first Ghanaian head of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, Sam Arthur, was an editor of the Kumasi paper.

A few years after *The Pioneer* began publishing, another paper began serving the Ashanti region. In the 1940s, the British-owned Ashanti Goldfields Company invested in the *Ashanti Times* and its sister paper in Bibiani, published in Obuasi, the company's base. The papers were nonpartisan but incurred the wrath of the nationalist movement for being "an imperialist tool."

In 1950, the British Mirror Group, as part of its post-World War II expansion into the British empire, set up the Graphic Company by buying out the local West African Graphic Company.

In the pre-independence period, the *Daily Graphic*, with enormous capital and modern facilities, threatened the many small papers run largely by the nationalist movement. Resistance was swift and widespread, ending in a three-month boycott campaign against the "white press." Local newspaper publishers and their political backers and allies feared the new foreign-owned newspaper would wipe them out of the competition. In that atmosphere, the *Daily Graphic* sometimes employed boxers to protect its newspaper delivery trucks.

For most of Ghana's history, the press has been a political instrument. Until the 1930s the people who published newspapers were mostly the well-educated elite of lawyers and doctors. These people were also invariably the leaders in the nationalist movement agitating for independence from colonialism. Even when business entrepreneurs entered the industry, they were allied to the political movement, and their papers were no less partisan.

The political and partisan character of the

Ghanaian press in the late 1940s and 1950s focused on the anti-colonial agitation. While papers aimed their propaganda guns at the British authorities, they also attacked each other with almost equal vehemence.

The party press was born at that time. The most successful of the early arrivals was developed by Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, which spawned a chain of party newspapers in Accra and the provincial centers of the country.

After independence in 1957, when a one-party socialist government took hold, the party's Guinea Press publishing company became a dominant force in the newspaper industry. It published the daily *Ghanaian Times* and the *Weekly Spectator*. When the Graphic Company and its *Daily Graphic* and *Sunday Mirror* were bought by the state in 1964, state monopoly became complete and absolute. Effectively, independent journalism ceased to exist, and with it much of the people's freedom of expression.

The military regimes, which took control in 1966 and ruled for 20 of the next 26 years until 1992, were repressive and showed little tolerance for media pluralism and press freedom.

Government licensing laws and decrees have been common, frequently disrupting development of the media. In 1963, a law gave the Minister of Information wide powers to stop anyone from publishing if the minister felt that publication would not be in the government's interests. In see-saw fashion, the law was repealed and reinstated on several occasions.

The laws proscribed independent, private press activity and put state-owned media under strict governmental controls. Direct censorship was applied now and then. Military regimes dictated editorial content. The Minister of Information exercised the controls. But the top leader also got involved in ensuring the state media projected the leader's desired image. This even included the curious act of deciding where photographs should appear in a newspaper and what should be covered.

In 1967, General Ankrah, the head of the country's first military junta was blunt about government controls of the state-owned media. He told a press

Its vicissitudes notwithstanding, *The Pioneer's* contribution to the profession's development has been remarkable.

conference: "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

Another method of keeping the state-owned media in line was arbitrary dismissals. All the past regimes, including the brief liberal ones, appointed and dismissed editors at will over editorial matters. The military regimes particularly seem to have been even more intent on controlling radio and television. Under the PNDC, for instance, between the regime's inception and the 1992 election, as many as six heads of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation were appointed.

Because press controls have been unpopular, every new attempt at liberal constitution-making features strong proposals for guarantees of press freedom and institutions for protecting them. In 1979, the Constitution had a full chapter devoted to press freedom. It also set up a Press Commission to ensure the rights were protected. It died with the Constitution in a coup d'etat.

But a publishing boom began in the late 1980s as Rawlings prepared to return Ghana to democracy. New, numerous and fiercely independent papers burst onto the streets, providing alternative views and reporting.

The picture of the media in the early 1990s was mixed. While some papers were committed to being relevant and to promoting the new order of democracy, a host of tabloids published with little or no regard for professional values. The driving motive for these tabloids was to sell a few copies of poorly produced news sheets to a curious and information-starved populace.

Most of the people entering the newspaper industry, whether working for a serious paper or a tabloid, had no journalism training. In fact, most had had no formal schooling beyond high school.

The state-owned media had virtually all the trained and experienced journalists, and these professionals were not yet ready to join the independent press. The newspapers could not afford to pay competitive salaries and benefits, and upstarts that were in business solely to make a quick profit did not care about having a capable staff. Also, the uncertain political landscape did little to encourage trained journalists to give up the security they had with the state-owned media.

For most of Ghana's history, the press has been a political instrument.

By the first elections in 1992, some of the unprofessional press had folded, though quite a number survived.

## THE PRESS TODAY

The publishing boom that began in the late 1980s continues today. Exact figures for the number of newspapers do not exist. Neither the Post Office, where all the papers must be registered, nor the National Media Commission, which has oversight responsibility for media independence, has up-to-date data. Moreover, publishers are not obliged to declare circulation figures, and they seem to share an understanding that revealing circulation figures could undermine sales or income.

More than 200 newspapers and magazines have appeared since 1990, some of them for as short a time as two editions.

Only three out of the three dozen or so regular newspapers are dailies, and all are state-owned: the *Daily Graphic* of the Graphic Communications Group Limited, and the *Ghanaian Times* and *Accra Evening News* published by the New Times Corporation. These two companies also publish weekly human interest weekend papers, *The Mirror* (Graphic Communications) and *The Spectator* (New Times).

The government-owned newspapers are widely read in part because they reflect the government's thinking and policies. They rarely offer a critical view of office-holders.

The *Ghanaian Chronicle*, *The Independent*, and *The Ghanaian Voice* are privately owned papers published three times a week. A few, such as *The Statesman* and the *Free Press*, appear twice weekly, with the rest coming out weekly. *The Chronicle* and *The Statesman*, both serious papers, also produce risqué weekend tabloids much unlike their flagship papers.

The first of the new papers to come out during the publishing boom was Kabral Blay-Amihere's *Independent* weekly in 1987. It was stopped after three issues by the Rawlings' military, but reappeared later.

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Of the newspapers emerging as part of the late 1980s democratization movement, the *Ghanaian Chronicle* may be the best known and perhaps the most widely read among the privately owned papers. Its popularity stemmed from its professional approach to news and issues.

Though the *Chronicle* started off cautiously, even avoiding editorials, it took up the tricky business of investigative reporting, muckraking official misconduct of a regime that had carefully constructed an image of “probity and accountability.” Kofi Coomson, the *Chronicle’s* daring editor and publisher, was a newcomer to Ghanaian journalism. But he made his paper attractive by bringing on board a few of the respected journalists. For instance, Blay-Amihere wrote a column and for some short periods edited the paper when Coomson was on a leave of absence. It also attracted younger but respected journalists like Kweku Sakyi Addo and Audrey Gadzekpo to its editorial staff. Sakyi Addo edited the paper while Coomson was away on a Nieman fellowship at Harvard University.

A weekly page by the late Professor P.A.V. Ansah also boosted readership.

The professor was a prominent communications scholar, director of the University of Ghana graduate School of Communication Studies, and a well-known and prolific commentator and publicist. His biting criticism, witty comments and sarcastic description of the undemocratic policies and arbitrariness of Rawlings’ government, in the early transition stages from dictatorship to liberal constitutional entity, sent many clamoring for the *Chronicle* every Monday morning. The *Chronicle* received financial support from UNESCO. In 1999 Haruna Atta, Rawlings’ brother-in-law, who has attacked corruption in government as editor of *The Statesman*, started his own paper, the *Accra Mail*, devoted to news of the capital.

*The Statesman* is seen as reflecting the views of the New Patriotic Party, the largest opposition group, because it is owned by a prominent lawyer and leading member of the party, Nana Akufo Addo.

*The Dispatch*, which has also appeared since 1999, is building a reputation as a reliable source of political news and analysis and is a useful chronicler of important political information. Its publisher and

editor, Ben Ephson, a lawyer, is a well-known journalist who was for years a stringer for the BBC and others in the international media.

The only paper of substance published outside Accra is *The Pioneer*, which comes out of Kumasi on weekdays. It covers provincial news of the Ashanti region as well as national events and issues. Founded in 1937, *The Pioneer* is Ghana's oldest surviving secular newspaper.

The *Asbanti Tribune*, published weekly in Accra, started coming out in June 2000, promising to cover Kumasi and the Ashanti region. Judging from its first issues, however, the newspaper seems to be joining the glutted market that covers national political affairs rather than focusing on provincial and local matters.

In Kumasi, the weekly *Kumasi Mail* was launched in mid-July.

The *Free Press*, which has had an on-and-off history over the past 20 years, adopted an aggressive anti-Rawlings stand when it resumed publication in 1992. The weekly, which later increased to twice a week, at one point had the highest circulation in the country, according to newspaper vendors this writer interviewed in 1992-93. Demand, according to its then-editor Eben Quarcoo, was difficult to meet.

In its professed war against Rawlings and his followers, the *Free Press* often had little regard for professional ethical values. Publisher Tommy Thomson, who died at 65 in 1998, argued that the Rawlings regime had no ethical values and therefore his paper could not extend to him and his government ethical treatment. Thomson had personal reasons to be bitter about Rawlings and his security. The *Free Press* newspaper was first founded in 1978. Twice in the 1980s Thomson and a staff reporter, Kweku Baako, were imprisoned without charge or trial by the regime. Thomson attributed his weakened health to the detentions. His editor in the early 1980s, John Kugblenu, with whom he was first detained, fell ill in detention and died shortly after his release. The paper suspended publication for six years in 1986.

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[Entertainment tabloids] sell well by exaggerating, embellishing and dramatizing true stories of murder and sex-related scandal, to the point of being surreal.

## THE ENTERTAINMENT PRESS

Ghana has a number of successful entertainment tabloids that focus on sex, scandal and news of the weird. The tabloid *P & P* is thought to have one of the highest circulations in the country.

Several titles compete with *P & P* in that market where gory and ghoulish tales are gospel for the masses. On the extreme are the purely fictional types like *Fun Time* that recycle sex-related tales of juju and witchcraft. *Top Story*, *Flash*, and *Love and Life*, like the highly patronized *P & P*, sell well by exaggerating, embellishing and making dramatic and surreal true stories of murder and sex-related scandal.

*The Graphic Showbiz* features news and information on the entertainment and leisure industry. It offers some reviews of music, theater, film and video.

## SPORTS PAPERS

Sports papers, which are plentiful, have played an interesting role in Ghana's history. During the early 1980s when it was impossible to operate an independent press, sports journalism proliferated with some papers offering political commentary disguised in sports language.

Each of the state-owned press houses has been publishing weekly sports papers since the late 1980s. *The Graphic Sports*, published by the Graphic Group, is the leading paper, coming out twice a week. *Africa Sports*, a weekly, is published and edited by Kwabena Yeboah, one of the country's best known sports writers.

Some of the larger soccer teams also have papers. Accra Hearts of Oak and the Phobians, two well-known teams, have papers, as does the Asante Kotoko. Two papers are devoted to the internationally acclaimed team, *The Kotoko Star* and the *Kumapem News*.

Sports papers are known for their bright colors, many photographs and poor journalistic quality. Soccer dominates coverage, with little attention given to other sports.

## BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS PUBLICATIONS

A number of business and finance publications also appear regularly, though the quality of many is questionable. The papers often appear to promote business and advertising rather than analyze economic affairs. Also, the boom in economics reporting, spawned in part by Ghana's healthy growth in the 1990s, means business news can be found in virtually all the newspapers and in radio news bulletins. Economic journalists have formed a club, with numerous seminars organized on the specialty reporting.

The *Business & Financial Times*, a weekly that promises "basic facts, objective thinking, reasoned analysis," provides general news and information and lengthy essays on economic and political subjects.

*High Street Journal*, named after Accra's downtown financial district, is an ambitious weekly providing relatively high quality writing and reliable business news and information, though it sometimes avoids news uncomfortable to the business community. It has built a lucrative advertising base, including regular sponsored supplements.

*Public Agenda*, a weekly owned by a rural development, nonprofit organization, ISODEC, does not have sections devoted exclusively to business, but covers major economic issues and trends, such as the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

*Public Agenda*, along with *The Independent* and the *Ghanaian Chronicle*, have provided investigative reports into economic mismanagement and reliable insights into the crises that have bedeviled Ghanaian banks recently.

They often appear to be promotional and advertising vehicles rather than serious papers with critical, analytical business and economic coverage.

## THE PARTY PRESS

Political parties also produce newspapers, although these propaganda sheets have little impact on public opinion.

The largest opposition force, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), publishes the *NPP News*. The Convention People's Party (CPP) had intermittently put out a monthly but it no longer publishes.

The NDC has been publishing the *Democrat* on and off since 1992. The *Palaver*, published by an NDC supporter, specializes in vitriolic attacks on opponents.

## FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FACING MEDIA

Private newspapers, often started with little capital, generally remain small operations with small staff and little technology. Circulation is the key to survival as advertising has not shown marked growth.

"The advertising opportunities are there," said Coomson of the *Chronicle*. "If a publisher is serious about getting advertisements, he will get them. But many don't care. Most depend on circulation, because they have very little staff and little overhead such as rent, transport and so on."

Haruna Atta of the *Accra Mail* sees it slightly differently. He thinks big advertisers fear political repercussions for advertising in private newspapers. Many companies, he said, continue to depend on government contracts.

"Advertising is not very good. There seems to be a political fear on the part of the advertisers. They don't advertise in the politically critical papers," Atta said.

Another problem, publishers say, is delayed payment.

"A few advertising companies, or the foreign missions in town, pay you very early when they buy space. Some of the big companies, even when they put in ads, don't pay for a very, very long time or at all for years. It is very bad," said Atta.

Circulation is also a concern, particularly with the recent decline in purchasing power.

"More people are sharing newspapers. And there is serious selective buying," Coomson said.

Added Atta: "Almost no paper is circulating above 10,000 copies. Many may be circulating just around 3,000. If you print about 3,000 and you get

Circulation is the key to their survival because advertising has not shown marked growth.

few returns, it calls for celebration.”

The state-owned papers face some of the same problems. Editors refuse to provide figures, and vendors say sales are slow. But state print media are buffered by other printing and packaging businesses. The Graphic Company, for example, does so well that it bought the London-based *West Africa* magazine a couple of years ago.

High production costs are also a challenge.

“Newsprint is killing,” Atta said. The net effect is that “the papers are losing in quality. Most of my colleagues have to go to small printing presses with poor machines which print poorly.” Printing equipment and material is imported. The devaluation of the cedi means, for instance, that newsprint prices have more than tripled from January–September 2000, from \$5,000 a ream to \$18,300 a ream.

Facing financial pressures, newspapers — private and state — have had difficulty attracting and keeping trained staff.

Salaries are not uniform. *The Graphic* pays a top salary, with reporters earning about \$110 a month. Some private papers pay half that.

## MAGAZINES

Magazines have traditionally fared poorly in Ghana, although Ghanaians have had a large role in magazines published abroad. In Ghana, news magazines are a rare commodity, and few if any have sustained publication for more than three years.

Today’s market includes the *African Agenda*, published by the Third World Network, a non-governmental development advocacy and research organization. A bimonthly, the magazine runs features and analyses on development and economic issues in Africa.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Ghanaians wrote and edited the Ghana edition of *Drum*, the widely circulated picture magazine, which was printed in South Africa and shipped back to Ghana.

Nkrumah’s government, intent on monopolizing the media and curbing freedom of expression, harassed the editors ceaselessly. *Drum* finally closed when Nkrumah’s Ghana and other countries in

Within Ghana, news magazines are a rare commodity; few, if any, have sustained publication for more than three years.

Despite magazines' dismal record within Ghana's borders, magazines about Ghana or owned by Ghanaians and published outside the country seem to have made progress.

Africa took a lead in opposing apartheid in Africa.

Another publication, *The Legon Observer*, a fortnightly with news analysis and commentary, was popular in the 1960s, but it earned the wrath of military dictators, ultimately going out of business in 1983.

Magazines about Ghana or owned by Ghanaians published from outside have done well. *The Ghana Review*, the first Ghanaian-owned publication to go on the Internet, is published from London. From London too, *West Africa* magazine, which has been in existence since 1917 and covers the country very well, is now published by the Graphic Communications Limited. The company acquired it from the *Lagos Daily Times* in 1999. The editor is Adama Gaye, a U.S.-educated Senegalese with broad experience on both sides of the Atlantic.

In Ghana, one of the longest running magazines was the monthly women's publication, *Obaa Sima* (Ideal Woman), which ran from the early 1970s until the mid-1980s. Its fortunes may have been decided by the vicissitudes of Ghana's economy.

In the early 1990s, an attempt by a new generation of young women publishers to put a women's magazine called *AWO* on the newsstands was also short-lived. "The business environment was tough," said Audrey Gadzekpo, who now teaches at the University of Ghana. "Distribution was a challenge. It plagues all publications."

Ms. Gadzekpo said the first issues were printed in Nigeria where printers adhered to deadlines. "But when we had to return to Ghana, the printers here did not meet deadlines."

Gadzekpo's partner at *AWO*, Nikki Boa-Amponsem, a biochemist by training, had in the late 1980s started a beauty and fashion publication called *Second Image*. It too lasted only into the early 1990s.

On the heels of *AWO*, Joyce Boye-Ocansey, now the acting managing director of the New Times Corporation, came out with *Career Woman*, which lasted a couple of years in the mid-1990s.

From the late 1980s up until the early 1990s, *Uburu* was the most popular and serious magazine of professional substance. The monthly provided in-depth treatment and well written features on social and political developments. It covered the arts and

culture with competence and provided interesting profiles of interesting personalities. It too went the way of all magazines in Ghana. A combination of problems with vendors and printers and escalating production costs kicked it out of the market.

Other magazines made fleeting appearances during the 1990s. They included, *What's Happening*, *Unique* and *Imagine*, a high-quality literary magazine that became a collectors' item.

For children, *The Playpen* was an ambitious, popular children's monthly. Coming out in the early 1990s, it circulated in primary and junior secondary schools for about five years, but closed for financial reasons.

(Newspapers, including *The Daily Graphic*, have children's pages. *The Independent* has a page with much of the content created by children.)

## LEGAL AND GOVERNMENTAL CONTROLS ON THE MEDIA

The 1992 Constitution revived the idea of institutional protection of media against governmental abuse and interference by creating the National Media Commission (NMC). It has responsibility for media independence and must work to "insulate the state-owned media from governmental control." It also mediates public complaints against media and has responsibility for ensuring "high journalistic standards." But the NMC has no control over media, private or state-owned. It can, however, propose legislation to Parliament on media.

From 1993 to 1996, tension arose between the government and the 18-member commission.

The Supreme Court stepped in to interpret two disputed issues. The first was over the authority to appoint heads of the state-owned media. The second raged over who had the power to allocate and manage the frequencies for radio and television broadcasting. The NMC and the government interpreted the constitutional provisions differently. The Supreme Court basically disqualified the NMC from frequency management in a decision involving a private citizen's case. About five years after the

Having long controlled the media, the government appeared neither ready nor willing to let go of powers nullified by the constitution.

case was lodged, the Court endorsed the NMC's claim of appointing chief executives of the state-owned media.

On July 28, 1998, a group called the Friends of Freedom of Expression, made up of journalists, publishers, academics, parliamentarians and lawyers, demonstrated in Accra "against the growing threats to press freedom by the courts of Ghana." In a protest statement, the group expressed "outrage" at "the increasing use of the courts ... to weaken press freedom and intimidate journalists."

That was five days after a Court of Appeal sentenced two editors, Kweku Baako and Haruna Atta, to prison for contempt of court. It was the first time a public demonstration was organized to challenge a court decision involving journalists.

The group stated that "over the months since the 4<sup>th</sup> Republican Constitution was ushered in, there is emerging a trend from court decisions and sentences which show that the Courts are using the law to cripple the media and frighten journalists from pursuing their activities without fear. ... The courts are now becoming an institution to subvert press freedom."

There had been over the months a spate of jail sentences against journalists and orders for the arrest and detention of journalists. Guilty journalists got heavy fines, and publishers and their companies in libel suits were slapped with extremely high damages. The protest, therefore, had resonance in the public, including some prominent jurists and lawyers. In the week of the protest by the Friends, a renowned former chief justice, Justice F.K. Apaloo, added weight to the outcry by attacking the contempt sentencing of the two editors. The late justice said on a radio talk show that throughout his more than 30 years experience on the bench in Ghana, Kenya and elsewhere, he had not known of a journalist imprisoned on a contempt charge.

There was a general perception in the public that the courts acted under the dictation of the executive and top government officials.

According to a NMC study in 1996, there were about 68 cases against media in court between 1993 and 1996. There had been 46 cases pending in the courts between 1990-95. In 1993 alone, the year in which the new Constitution came into force, there

The general public perception was that the courts acted under the dictation of the executive and top government officials.

were 41. Of the 46, about a third, or 14, of the complaints were brought to court by officials of the ruling NDC party or their close relations. All the defendants were private newspaper editors and publishers.

Between November 1995 and March 1996, cabinet ministers, leading figures of the ruling party and its members of Parliament filed 21 lawsuits against the media. One MP alone filed eight. By June 1999, according to officials of the Private Newspaper Publishers Association, there were about 120 court cases against the private press, most of them from officials of the government and the ruling party.

One case involved Justice Isaac K. Abban, a Supreme Court judge who became chief justice not long after the case was filed. A columnist of the *Free Press* wrote that the judge had falsified a statement in a decision he had written concerning some other case. It turned out that the columnist's claim was correct. But the courts found the article contemptuous. The columnist was jailed one month and the editor one day. That added more fuel to the public perception that the courts were out to gag the private press.

The fines and damages imposed or awarded by the courts also gave cause for complaint. Again on June 2, 1999, the Friends of Freedom of Expression issued a statement complaining of the "excessive damages and costs" imposed on the *Ghanaian Chronicle*. The paper was found guilty in a 1997 case of libel involving then Minister of Transport and Communication Edward Saliah. The court awarded the minister damages of ₵40 million (then about \$16,000) and costs of about \$800.

In an earlier libel case brought against the *Guide*, a court fined the paper \$12,000 in a case brought by the Youth and Sports Minister Enoch Teye Mensah.

A number of cases have also involved Rawlings' wife. These have included criminal libel charges against *The Chronicle* and the *Free Press*, and most of these cases are still before the courts. The most celebrated case of criminal libel, though, was brought against the editor of the *Christian Chronicle*, George Naykene, in the early 1990s. He was found guilty and sentenced to 18 months

In recent months, however, the courts seem to have been sensitive to public opinion concerning their handling of media cases.

imprisonment. In recent months, however, the courts seem to have been sensitive to public opinion concerning their handling of media cases. Milder sentences and decisions considered “fair” have been coming out of some of the courts.

## BROADCASTING

Unlike the independent press, which burst onto the scene during political flux in the late 1980s, independent broadcasting was born in controversy, litigation and political tension. Uncertainties remain over some issues of policy and regulation.

Radio is the dominant source of information in the country. Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the government-owned radio and television broadcaster, was the sole provider until 1994 when the University of Ghana at Legon, near Accra, started the first privately owned radio station with news and other programs.

Today scores of privately owned radio stations fill the airwaves. Many are shoe-string operations that provide mainly music.

In the 1980s, prior to the campus station in Accra, students of the “Katanga” Hall at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi had run amateur radio stations from home-made transmitters and equipment. In that city at about the same time, a private electronics workshop, OTEC, had fabricated transmitters, and its music broadcasts could be heard several miles around. It was granted a frequency, but only to play music.

From the beginning, the University of Ghana station spawned controversy, disappointment and dissension among advocates of independent media.

Shortly after the campus station appeared, the government’s Frequency Registration and Control Board (FRCB) forced it off the air, saying it had selected its 99.7 MHz frequency without the board’s authorization. However, the board allowed the station to resume transmission on a new frequency, 105.7 MHz.

The board then allocated the 99.7 MHz frequency to the first commercial radio station, JOY FM. It operated as a joint venture between the state-owned

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Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and a private company, Multimedia Company Limited.

While JOY FM operated, the FRCB kept denying other applicants frequencies for operation using various excuses. At one point, the FRCB claimed that only four frequencies were available on the VHF band that could be allocated. The stalling frustrated prospective investors in the broadcast business. Then came the biggest test to the government's commitment to independent broadcasting.

A new station in Accra called Radio Eye hit the airwaves on 96.2 MHz on Nov. 19, 1994. Two weeks later, on Dec. 4, it was silenced. Armed police stormed the studio and offices of the station at dawn and confiscated its equipment. Dr. Charles Wereko-Brobby, chief executive of the station's owner, Independent Media Corporation, and today a presidential candidate, was arraigned with his colleagues on charges under the 1977 Telecommunications Decree that they had installed and used telecommunications apparatus and a radio frequency without permission.

The Radio Eye case raised critical and controversial constitutional questions concerning media independence and the appropriate institutional structures for broadcasting regulation. The 1992 Constitution provides that no one is required to have a license to operate any newspaper or other medium of mass communication. The provision had been aimed at protecting media from governmental interference.

The Supreme Court, acting on Wereko-Brobby's appeal, ruled that radio and television operation required prior licensing, citing scarcity of frequencies and Ghana's international obligations to the International Telecommunications Union,

Wereko-Brobby also challenged the legal authority of the FRCB, which had been set up under a decree enacted by a military regime, to manage and allocate frequencies to broadcasting operators. He argued that because the FRCB is under the office of the president and has close relations with the security agencies, it is not independent and, therefore, was not the proper body to manage and allocate frequencies. The Supreme Court, five years later, is still grappling with the case, and Radio Eye

Today scores of privately owned stations fill the airwaves. Many are shoe-string operations providing mainly music.

The Radio Eye case raised critical and controversial constitutional questions concerning media independence and the appropriate institutional structures for broadcasting regulation.

remains silent.

Despite the Radio Eye case, the FRCB has proceeded to hand out frequencies, resulting in a babel of stations on the airwaves.

While debate continues over who controls the broadcasting industry, independent stations share the airwaves with state-owned broadcasters, without any clear national regulatory and policy framework. Commercial stations cover Accra, the capital, and Kumasi. Of the remaining eight provincial administrative centers, Koforidua, Takoradi and Sunyani each have one commercial station. In the rest of the country, a small semi-commercial station serves the Upper Western capital of Wa, while Cape Coast and Ho are served by one campus station each.

Some stations cover several rural communities. Most of these are commercial or partially commercial stations, but some are nonprofit stations that focus on providing development information and offering public service to the communities.

Radio Ada, operating in a district about an hour east of Accra, is one of the best organized of these local stations. Its staff consists largely of volunteers, and it has local news staff. It broadcasts in Dangbe, the local language, and its studios are open to community involvement. Its programs have a considerable component of social development material.

Commercial stations also contribute to the public debate, particularly through phone-in programs. Government politicians are often treated critically on these shows. But Radio Eye's Wereko-Brobby complains that private radio is often bland and lacks teeth.

"Either by design or a very unusual accident, the private radio stations have shied away from addressing national social and political concerns on a systematic and insightful basis. There seems to be a regime of self-censorship in operation. Public figures decide when, if at all, they will accept to appear on programs to explain their policies and actions to people. There is an unerring desire to please or at least not to 'offend' authority," he said at a 1999 conference.

He continued in a paper he presented: "Pandering to a false notion that people do not like politics, private broadcasting stations are failing to

deliver quality news and current affairs programs that offer diversity, pluralism and real information to people on important national issues.”

The relatively high cost of news programming is one reason few stations devote extensive time to reporting.

The *Ghanaian Chronicle* recently said in a column: “A number of FM stations have thrown all these marks of good broadcasting overboard. In their place, we have such pure nonsense ... Risky jokes and general frivolity have become the stock-in-trade of some of the very young persons — men and women — who sit in front of the microphones as they exchange what they judge to be pleasantries.”

JOY FM, perhaps the most well-known Accra station, does better than its competitors in the amount of news its own staff produces. Most air time on the other stations is taken up by music, commercials and the prattle of disc jockeys.

But a distinguishing — and popular — feature of private radio is the plethora of call-in shows that allow people to voice their opinions on a range of subjects, frequently political. The shows have broadened the political debate around the country.

The use of Ghanaian languages is also an important attraction for listeners. In the provinces, most private stations use local languages, garnering popularity. In Accra, the university station introduced programs in Twi and Ewe and quickly won over many listeners.

Another station, Peace FM, entered the market broadcasting exclusively in Twi, the most widely spoken language, and was an instant success. High demand for advertising space has forced up the station’s rates. Others are taking cues from that and are introducing local language programs.

But the introduction of Ghanaian languages has not translated into better quality programming. Complaints about unethical and unprofessional practices are increasing and are beginning to prompt public discussions.

The independent radio sector is dominated by the Multimedia Company, owners of JOY FM. The company opened a station in Kumasi called LOVE FM in 1998. In 2000, it bought Groove FM in Accra,

While debate continues over control of the broadcasting industry, independent stations share the airwaves with state-owned broadcasters without any clear national regulatory or policy framework.

The relatively high cost of news programming is one reason few stations devote extensive time to reporting.

moved it to Tema, Accra's twin harbor city, and renamed it Adom FM. To cash in on the language appeal, the station broadcasts mostly in Twi.

Privately owned radio stations, like newspapers, have been hit by tight economic times and advertising revenues have fallen. Several stations have considered staff cuts and drastic slashes in transmission hours. The growing number of media outlets now compete for advertising revenue, and in some cases slow payments by advertisers have forced stations into debt.

Nevertheless, private radio stations in Accra generally pay a little better than the newspapers. Some start new staff on a salary of about \$125 a month. But at rural stations, the story is different. Radio journalists may make as little as \$20 a month.

Independent radio stations have attracted large audiences, but they have not dented the strength of the state-owned stations.

The government-owned GBC radio and TV stations cover the entire country. The company began radio broadcasting in 1935, added television in 1965, and two years later introduced commercial service, breaking with its tradition of public, noncommercial broadcasting.

In 1986, GBC opened a service, designed at first to cover agricultural and developmental programming, for the northern portion of the country. Together with the corporation's English-only and the Ghanaian languages channels transmitting on short wave, the GBC stations cover the entire country and reach most people, urban and rural. Today, GBC has FM commercial services in Accra and six of the nine provincial capitals, all of which compete fervently with the independent stations for listeners and advertising money. GBC, for instance, depends on one source, Unilever Ghana Limited, for more than half its commercial revenue.

## TELEVISION

GBC Television is still the dominant service. Its transmission reaches everywhere in the country. It started in 1965, and introduced color transmission in 1985. It operates one channel and transmits an aver-

age of 12 hours a day, a big jump from the early 1980s when it beamed only three hours of the day. As with many TV stations in Africa, its capacity to produce local programs has declined with any increase in total air time. In the 1970s, it was known for producing over 75 percent of its own programs. Today, that rate is about 62 percent.

GTV, as it is called now, is seeing increasing competition from multinational companies and some local establishments. From the mid-1990s the South African company Multichoice has expanded tremendously its list of subscribers to its satellite transmissions. It has now extended services to places outside Accra.

Direct competition to GTV, however, has come from new stations that started operating within the past five years. The first to be established was TV 3. A venture between the Ghana government and a Malaysian company, the new company bought out the old Ghana Film Industry Corporation. TV 3 transmits only to Accra and surrounding areas.

The other private station is Metro TV. That is also a joint venture between GBC and a private Ghanaian company. Both stations transmit an average six hours a day. TV 3 produces high quality local news programs, though the news consists principally of Accra events and issues. Both stations import many of their programs. A number of companies have registered but have not started operating.

## INTERNET

Ghanaian journalists are eagerly embracing the Internet. Virtually all newspapers in Ghana are available on the Internet, with news of Ghana available to those inside and outside the country. Inside Ghana, Internet serves only an elite audience with access to the web. But outside the country, Ghanaians around the world keep up with daily news and have a keen interest in their country's politics.

## MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS

The Ghana Journalists Association has played a major role in promoting press freedom in the country. Its membership is about 2,000 from all the media, regardless of ownership or political persuasion. It is a professional association whose objectives and activities promote the interests and rights of its members and transcend the sectarian differences of the members.

The association got off the ground in the early years of independence. Its strength has followed the checkered political fate of journalism in the country. Similarly, GJA's relationship with government has been sweet and sour. When it has suited a government, attempts have been made to control GJA. In other times, it has been treated with coldness and near hostility.

Sometimes, too, it has received generous assistance from government. The first government after independence gave GJA premises for a press club that functioned very actively. In the 1990s the government awarded it support for renting office premises. Now, the GJA is trying to assert its independence. It has started an endowment fund, for which it is raising money to support itself. The GJA also receives support from donor organizations for a number of its activities.

The GJA is not a union with legal or institutional mandate to negotiate or promote the conditions of service for its members. The association actively defends members' democratic and human rights, while it also promotes professional standards of media and of its members. GJA encourages competition through annual awards and honors, while its Ethics Committee monitors members' professional performance and imposes disciplinary measures.

In 1991, at the height of the boom in newspaper publishing, owners of the new private newspapers formed the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG). Its main concern was to defend the rights of the industry against what seemed to be threats from government in the very early years of transition to democratic governance.

It has also been interested, though not very

[The association's] strength has reflected the checkered political fate of journalism in the country. Similarly, its relationship with government has been sweet and sour.

active, in the economic problems the industry faces. In the mid-1990s, the PRINPAG held several consultations to deal with circulation problems. It was prompted by the lack of discipline in the circulation business, which is dominated by small-scale vendors whose negligence and fraud have often rendered newspapers and magazines bankrupt.

The association has not found a solution. Neither has it succeeded in setting up or getting an investor to set up a distribution company they could deal with. It also has yet to obtain support to set up a printing business that would serve the members and reduce costs and dependence on technically unreliable printers.

Most members of the PRINPAG are also editors of their newspapers. Several years ago, an attempt to set up an Editors' Guild did not take off, due mostly to weak commitment. With the PRINPAG, the need for the Guild may not be so pressing.

An older, but now less active professional group is the Association of Women in the Media (ASWIM). It was started in the early 1980s as a grouping of various women's associations in individual media houses, bringing together women journalists, broadcasters and those in other departments of media institutions. It sought to provide a forum for handling welfare and professional needs of its members by organizing training programs and seminars.

ASWIM's activities seem to have waned since the Ghana Journalists Association reorganized itself and revitalized its activities. Its inactivity cannot be attributed to the creation of either the regional West Africa Media Network, a largely women's organization, or the local Ghana Women In Broadcasting because neither has developed a strong presence.

The owners and operators of community as well as independent radio stations located in district towns and serving rural audiences, have set up a network to promote the welfare and professional interests of its members. It makes presentations to government on policy matters affecting its members. It also provides some amount of training for stations within the network to improve program quality and management efficiency.

The Association of Private Broadcasters, which was inaugurated in 1998, groups together private

The association actively defends members' democratic and human rights, while it also promotes professional standards of media and of its members.

owners and operators of commercial radio and television stations. The organization has presented members' positions to government and plans to establish an agency to survey audiences and perform ratings for the industry.

## JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Ghana has had more than 40 years of formal institutional training for journalists. The Ghana Institute of Journalism, a post-secondary school, was opened in 1959 by the government to train journalists. Most of the country's journalists with formal training are graduates of this two-year institute.

In the 1980s, GIJ introduced programs in public relations, and it plans soon to offer an undergraduate degree program in journalism with diplomas to be awarded by the University of Ghana. The institute's training has concentrated on print journalism, offering few courses in broadcasting.

Training in radio broadcasting has been mostly an on-the-job and in-house activity.

Training in radio broadcasting has been mostly an on-the-job and in-house activity. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation has its own training programs for its staff. In the past it also sent some staff to the BBC in London, the Radio Netherlands Training Centre at Hilversum and Radio Deutsche Welle for additional training in program production.

GBC Television started out with training mostly by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, though some staff received training in film production and other skills from the former Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. In the mid-1970s, however, with funding and technical assistance from the German government, the GBC and the former Ghana Film Industries Corporation set up the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI) to train personnel for the two organizations.

NAFTI is now an autonomous institute and is starting an undergraduate degree program in film and television. It also is expected to be affiliated with the University of Ghana.

University-level training in media started in Ghana in 1972 when the University of Ghana opened the School of Communication Studies. A graduate school offering a diploma and a master's degree, it

combines training in journalism, radio broadcasting, advertising and public relations, and academic courses in communications. It takes candidates with a bachelor's degree and professionals with extensive experience.

Since the school started, though, very few of its graduates have chosen careers in the newspaper or broadcasting media. The majority have gone into public relations, advertising and research. Today, a few are taking positions in the new private press and radio stations.

The school has been prominent in organizing training courses for professionals over the years, particularly in the last decade, either by itself or in collaboration with other agencies or professional associations.

The rapid growth in independent radio stations in the country as well as the increasing public demand for higher professional standards are fueling the urgent demands for training. In many ways, too, the rapid developments may require the training institutions to review and expand or redefine their programs to meet the new challenges. Also, there are signs that some private agencies may soon offer media training.

## THE MEDIA AND ELECTIONS

The months leading to the first elections in 1992 were full of anxiety and excitement. The political atmosphere was tense and polarized. The language of campaigning was full of hostility, mistrust and venom on all parts. As was to be expected, the private press assumed a watchdog role.

The private press were almost unanimously opposed to Rawlings' National Democratic Congress winning and continuing the air force pilot's rule. They backed the opposition firmly, and openly campaigned against the regime's party. They were, however, very critical of what some like the *Chronicle* considered the opposition's ineptitude in organizational skills. They were also unhappy about the divisions among the opposition parties.

The state-owned media, however, seemed confused and ambivalent about their roles. The GBC's

The journalists wanted now to exercise editorial independence; the government was determined to control them firmly.

radio and television services were used effectively and strongly by the regime and its new party. Since they could not ignore the opposition completely, they provided some coverage. The TV followed Rawlings, his wife and their followers everywhere and projected them disproportionately in relation to the opposition.

For the state-owned press, however, things were slightly different. The *Daily Graphic* particularly, and the *Spectator Weekly* of the New Times Corporation, showed mixed attitudes towards the elections and the entire transition process. Tensions soon developed between the journalists and management. The journalists wanted now to exercise editorial independence; the government was determined to control them firmly. The journalists were emboldened by provisions in the new Constitution, but the Constitution had not yet been ratified.

In early October, about a month before the presidential and parliamentary elections, the rift between management and editorial staff of the *Daily Graphic* reached a critical point. In the effort to find common ground, the editorial section and the board of directors produced differing versions of guidelines for coverage of the elections.

To stem the brewing pressure for editorial independence, the board of directors, under quite obvious governmental pressure, took administrative action against key journalists perceived to be too assertive for their independence. Such journalists were transferred to provincial bureaus of the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*.

By and large, however, the state-owned press gave the regime more coverage than they did the opposition. In a study of the coverage of the elections by the two state-owned dailies between May and December 1992, this author found that the two state-owned dailies gave more space to the incumbent regime's party than to the main opposition New Patriotic Party. The data showed that the *Daily Graphic* gave the NDC twice as much space as it did the NPP and published on its front page more news stories on the NDC than the NPP. The difference in the total number of articles each party received in the *Daily Graphic* does not appear too significant. It was just 10 percent. The important difference is in the

total amount of space in square centimeters given to stories on each of the parties.

The *Ghanaian Times*, on the other hand, showed greater discrimination in its coverage of the two principal contending parties. It gave, for instance, only one front page news report on the NPP, against eight for the NDC. *The Times* gave no coverage of the opposition NPP in its center pages, but published 23 stories on the NDC. Altogether it gave more than three times as much space for the NDC as it gave the NPP.

Several papers published polls in the weeks and months leading to the elections of 1992 and 1996. The authenticity and credibility of the polls were so questionable that Kwatriot, a highly respected columnist of *The Mirror* wrote sarcastically: "God has given him (the journalist) the talent of opinion polling, such that he can decide to opinion-pull you down today, and opinion-pull you up the next day."

## MEDIA IN THE 2000 ELECTIONS

In the elections that led to victory for President Kufuor, the media provided full coverage of party congresses, selection of parliamentary candidates and wrangles over presidential running mates in the 2000 elections. The independent media generally viewed the Rawlings' government and the NDC critically. Journalists gave keen coverage to the parties, including the new National Reform Party, the breakaway from the ruling NDC. The state-owned media worked hard to minimize their usual bias for the incumbent government and its candidates. Coverage was given to controversies within the NDC over selection of parliamentary candidates in several constituencies around the country.

There was a high public demand for professional and fair media coverage of the elections. Moreover, there was more pressure on the state media to provide "fair" coverage to and "equal" access for the political parties and their candidates to reach the electorate. The Ghana Journalists Association, the National Media Commission, and other bodies have engaged the media in training programs and seminars to encourage professional

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and quality coverage of the elections.

The GBC for instance has held a couple of programs for its own staff. The corporation has also drawn up its own internal guidelines for its staff on the coverage of the elections. GBC also provided free, equal time slots for all the presidential candidates.

The *Daily Graphic*, as well as the *Ghanaian Chronicle* wrote editorials exhorting the media to provide coverage that is fair and credible and that promotes a peaceful election program.

The National Media Commission contracted the School of Communication Studies to do a study of how fairly the state media have covered the political parties over the years. This, according to the commission, is demanded by Parliament to find out how these media are meeting their constitutional obligations. Non-governmental organizations monitored exercises to observe the entire media's coverage of the elections.

The media themselves called for a peaceful elections and cautioned politicians against strong language and, as the *Daily Graphic* put it in an editorial in May, "passionate polemics."

In all this, the newest comers into the business of election coverage and public participation are the private radio stations. There was none before the 1992 elections. By the 1996 exercise, only JOY FM and Univers in Accra, and OTEC in Kumase existed. In 2000, candidates and the voters had access to stations across the country.

While the media garnered praise from many quarters, Rawlings, the former president, lashed out at the media during the year leading up to the election that saw defeat for his hand-picked successor. In August 2000, the president spoke out against the media in a meeting of delegates of the Egle Party, a small party affiliated with his NDC. He attacked the state-owned media, whose loyalty to him has been consistent, of failing to publicize well enough the reasons for the country's economic problems.

More in relation to the election campaigns, he accused the private press of "fabricating and printing the blatant lies and insults of the opposition."

In June 2000, Mrs. Rawlings lamented at a rally that the state-owned media were not supporting her

The public had a higher awareness of, and demand for, professional and fair media coverage of the elections.

husband's government. She charged that since they were state-owned facilities they were obliged to support the government.

Notwithstanding the Rawlings' complaints, the media's handling of elections in 2000 showed great improvement in coverage.

The peaceful transition from one party to another encouraged many Ghanaians. "There is euphoria in Ghana," said George Ayyitey, a professor at American University in Washington, D.C.

Added Alfred Ogbamey, a senior staff correspondent with *The Ghanaian Chronicle*: "There is no doubt that this election to a large extent was determined by the media."

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The Freedom Forum, based in Arlington, Va., is a nonpartisan, international foundation dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people. The foundation focuses on four main priorities: the Newseum, First Amendment issues, newsroom diversity and world press freedom.

The Freedom Forum funds two independent affiliates — the Newseum, the interactive museum of news in Arlington; and the First Amendment Center, with offices at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and in New York City and Arlington. Other operating offices are in Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, London and Cocoa Beach, Fla.

The Freedom Forum was established in 1991 under the direction of Founder Allen H. Neuharth as successor to a foundation started in 1935 by newspaper publisher Frank E. Gannett. The Freedom Forum is not affiliated with Gannett Co., does not solicit or accept financial contributions, and does not accept unsolicited funding requests. Its work is supported by income from an endowment now worth about \$1 billion in diversified assets.

