Ghana in 2005

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Although the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) enjoyed a safe majority in parliament, the performance of the government was subjected to closer critical scrutiny than at any other point since 2000. Claims of ministerial corruption recurred repeatedly over the course of the year. Whereas President J.A. Kufuor had hitherto been treated with considerable reverence by the media, he and his family also became the target of specific allegations. While the government often appeared rather embattled, it was greatly helped by the re-emergence of a deep rift within the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). There was also a modest uplift in the national economy over the year. Although this was not enough to make much visible impact on the lives of ordinary Ghanaians, it did at least enable ministers to claim that the stewardship of the country was in competent hands.

Domestic Politics

Under the constitution, the president is expected to give an account of his tenure at the end of each four-year term of office. Whereas his NDC predecessor as president, Jerry Rawlings, had not done so, Kufuor began the year with a state of the nation address to parliament on 4 January in which he robustly defended his first term (2000–04). He asserted that the economy was in much better shape than when he took over and reiterated his commitment to ensuring good governance and probity. The next four years were billed as Positive Change II, in which the president pledged to
make greater strides towards achieving concrete results in poverty alleviation. While the NDC argued that Kufuor was claiming credit for many initiatives that had been started under Rawlings, independent commentators gave measured approval. Three days later, on 7 January, parliament itself was dissolved and the new one, chosen in the December 2004 elections and expanded from 200 to 230 members, was sworn in. The politicking began immediately when the NPP decided to drop the former speaker, who was then sponsored by the NDC instead. The NPP prevailed and later the same day, President Kufuor was sworn in for his second term.

The composition of the new cabinet became a matter of considerable public interest because it was taken as an indicator of who Kufuor might be backing to succeed him in 2008. The presidential nominations for ministerial posts produced few high-profile casualties. The highly regarded finance minister, Yaw Osafo Maafo, was moved to the education and sports portfolio. Although this would normally have been interpreted as a demotion, it was widely believed that Kufuor was manoeuvring him into a position where he might actually benefit from being the breaker of ‘good news’. Qualification by the national football team for the World Cup finals in October was a turn of particularly good fortune. His replacement, Kwadwo Baah-Wiredu, was regarded as an equally safe pair of hands and in effect swapped ministries with Maafo. The parliamentary vetting of the president’s nominees provoked much controversy when three prospective ministers were found to have misrepresented aspects of their personal histories and were accused being implicated in corruption. Once again, the NPP used its parliamentary majority to push the nominations through, to the intense annoyance of the NDC and the consternation of independent political commentators. At the start of June, it was revealed that one of the ministers in question, Dr. Richard Anane, was under investigation by the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).