

Know Your Road Rights

Road Law, Police Powers, and the Citizen's Guide to Surviving a Traffic Stop in Ghana

*A Civic Education Research Paper on
Your Legal Rights as a Ghanaian Road User,
Police Accountability, and the End of Roadside Extortion*

Nana Kwaku Amoako

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Abstract

This paper is a plain-English guide for Ghanaian drivers who want to know what the law allows during a traffic stop. It explains the four documents an officer may ask for, the real rule on tinted windows, the rights a driver keeps at the roadside, and the safest way to respond when an officer asks for cash instead of issuing a ticket. The guide draws on the Road Traffic Act, 2004 (Act 683), the Road Traffic Regulations, 2012 (L.I. 2180), the Road Traffic Amendment Act, 2025 (Act 1153), the 1992 Constitution, and recent governance data from the Ghana Statistical Service.

The message is simple. If you have broken the law, the proper response is a written citation and an official payment channel or court process. It is not money handed to an officer at a checkpoint. Ghana's own data shows how serious the problem is: the MTTD recorded the highest bribery rate among public institutions surveyed in 2024, then fell to 51.9 percent in the first half of 2025. That drop matters. More drivers knowing their rights means fewer easy targets for roadside extortion.

Keywords: Ghana road law, MTTD, DVLA, traffic stop rights, tinted windows, police bribery, Act 683, Act 1153, 1992 Constitution, CHRAJ

1. Introduction

Most Ghanaian drivers know the feeling. You are stopped at a checkpoint. The officer looks at your documents, looks at your car, then says something is wrong: the tint, the fire extinguisher, the roadworthy certificate, the speed you were allegedly doing. You are not sure. You do not want trouble. So you pay something small and move on.

That is exactly how roadside extortion survives. It feeds on uncertainty. The officer may know the law, or may only know that you do not. Either way, the pressure works because the driver is tired, embarrassed, afraid of delay, and unsure what to say.

This guide is for that moment. It is not a guide to arguing with police officers. It is a guide to staying calm, knowing the basics, and insisting on the proper process. In most traffic situations, the safest sentence is also the strongest one: "Please write me a ticket so I can address it through the proper channel."

The law does not disappear at a checkpoint. A driver still has constitutional rights. An officer still has limits. If there is an offence, there should be a citation, a lawful record, and an official payment route or court process. If there is only a demand for roadside cash, the problem is no longer traffic enforcement. It is bribery.

This paper is a companion to *The People Are the Bosses*. That paper makes the wider constitutional argument that public officials serve the people. This paper brings the same idea down to the road: the officer at your window has authority, but that authority comes from the public and must be used lawfully.

2. The legal stack

Ghana's road law is not one document. It is a stack. Knowing the stack helps you tell the difference between lawful enforcement and a made-up excuse for cash.

At the top is the **1992 Constitution**. Article 1 says the power of government comes from the people. Articles 14 and 15 protect liberty and dignity. That means an officer may stop you for a lawful reason, but the officer may not detain, threaten, insult, or humiliate you without legal basis. The uniform gives authority. It does not give permission to abuse people.¹

The main traffic law is the **Road Traffic Act, 2004 (Act 683)**. It covers registration, licensing, seatbelts, speeding, document checks, and police powers on the road. Sections 120 and 121 are especially important because they deal with what officers may require from drivers during traffic enforcement.²

1. Republic of Ghana, *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992 (as amended 1996)*, Articles 1, 14, 15, 19, 21, 35. Available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996 and <https://judicial.gov.gh/constitution>, 1992.

2. Republic of Ghana, *Road Traffic Act, 2004 (Act 683)*, Sections 1 to 3 (speeding), 7 (roadworthy), 13

The working details sit in the **Road Traffic Regulations, 2012 (L.I. 2180)**. This is where many checkpoint arguments come from: tinted windows, safety equipment, vehicle condition, and roadworthy standards. If an officer says your tint or extinguisher is illegal, the officer is relying on these regulations and should be able to say what rule has been breached.³

The newest major update is the **Road Traffic Amendment Act, 2025 (Act 1153)**. It lowers alcohol limits, strengthens child safety rules, updates mobile-phone restrictions, adds fatigue rules, and regulates some commercial motorcycle and tricycle use. These are real rules. They still have to be enforced through lawful process, not roadside bargaining.⁴

Police conduct is also governed by the **Police Service Regulations, 2012 (C.I. 76)**. A uniformed officer should be identifiable, including by service number or badge. If you later make a complaint, the service number, date, time, and location will matter.⁵

Finally, bribery is not a "settlement." Section 239 of the Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29) treats the solicitation of a bribe as a criminal offence. CHRAJ also exists to receive complaints about abuse of public office.⁶ The short version is this: traffic law allows enforcement. It does not allow an officer to turn your fear into private income.

3. Your documents

For a routine traffic stop, keep the basics simple. A police officer may ask for four documents: your driver's licence, roadworthy certificate, motor insurance certificate, and vehicle registration.⁷

(seatbelts), 18 (registration), 120 to 121 (police powers). Available at: <https://repository.parliament.gh> and <https://ghanalegal.com>, 2004.

3. Republic of Ghana, *Road Traffic Regulations, 2012 (L.I. 2180)*, Regulation 67(3)(4)(6) (tinted windows and windscreens); safety equipment provisions. Available at <https://ghanalegal.com>, 2012.

4. Parliament of Ghana, *Road Traffic Amendment Act, 2025 (Act 1153)*, Passed 11 December 2025; in force from early 2026. Revised BAC limits, mandatory child restraints, mobile phone prohibition, fatigue management, motorcycle provisions. Parliament.gh news: <https://www.parliament.gh/news?CO=250>, December 2025.

5. Republic of Ghana, *Police Service Regulations, 2012 (C.I. 76)*, Sixth Schedule, Regulation 28(3): mandatory visible badge for all uniformed officers. Also: Police Service Act, 1970 (Act 350). Real Rights Platform (Baker McKenzie): <https://realrights.bakermckenzie.com/en/pages/accra-ghana>, 2012.

6. Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), *CHRAJ: Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice: Official Website and Citizen Services*, Government of Ghana, Constitutional basis: Articles 216 to 230, 1992 Constitution. CHRAJ Act, 1993 (Act 456). Toll-free: 0800-800-900. <https://www.chrajghana.com>, 2024.

7. Republic of Ghana, *Road Traffic Act, 2004 (Act 683)*.

Document	What to check before driving
Driver's licence	It is valid and not expired.
Roadworthy certificate	It is current for your vehicle category.
Motor insurance certificate	It is active. You can confirm by dialing *920*57#.
Vehicle registration	The registration details match the vehicle.

That is the ordinary document check. An officer should not turn a routine stop into a demand for your Ghana Card, your phone, or cash. If a document is expired, the correct response is a written citation or another official process. It is not a roadside payment to make the officer wave you through.

The DVLA penalty for an expired roadworthy certificate is paid through official channels, not to an officer's hand.⁸ Insurance offences and seatbelt offences also require lawful process. A cash demand without a printed or written citation, without a named offence, and without an official payment route is not a fine. It is a bribe.

Do the boring things early. Renew documents before they expire. Keep paper copies in the glovebox and digital copies on your phone. Check your insurance with *920*57# before long trips. An officer looking for an easy target prefers the driver who is confused. Do not be that driver.

4. The tinted windows question

Tinted windows are one of the easiest ways to scare a driver at a checkpoint because many people have heard different versions of the rule. The rule is narrower than the rumours.

Regulation 67 of L.I. 2180 makes two points. First, do not tint the front windscreen. Second, other windows may be tinted if they allow at least 70% visible light transmission, often called VLT.⁹ In plain English: front windscreen tint is the problem. Side-window tint is not automatically illegal. It becomes a problem when it is too dark.

If your car has after-market tint, ask the installer for the VLT certificate and keep a copy with your documents. If you bought the car already tinted, have the windows tested with a VLT meter at an auto-glass shop. It is cheaper to know your tint level than to negotiate at every checkpoint.

If an officer says your windows are illegal, stay calm and ask two questions: "Which part of Regulation 67 are you relying on?" and "What is the VLT reading?" If the officer believes there is an offence, ask for a written citation. Even a genuine tint offence should

8. Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) Ghana, *Roadworthy Certificate Renewal Guide and Penalty Schedule*, DVLA Ghana / JBKlutse.com, Penalty for expired roadworthy: GHc 500 (April 2026). <https://www.jbklutse.com/roadworthy-ghana/> and <https://dvla.gov.gh>, April 2026.

9. Republic of Ghana, *Road Traffic Regulations, 2012 (L.I. 2180)*.

move through court or an official process. It should not end with GHc 50 in somebody's pocket.

5. Common stop claims

Most checkpoint pressure follows a pattern. The officer names a problem, keeps the rule vague, then waits for you to offer money. The answer is almost always the same: ask for the specific offence and request a written citation.

Here are common claims and the basic response:

- **Tinted windscreen or dark side windows.** Ask for the Regulation 67 basis and, for side windows, the VLT reading.
- **Expired roadworthy certificate.** Ask for the citation and address the matter through DVLA or the official process.
- **Expired insurance.** Dial *920*57# and show the live confirmation if your policy is active.
- **Expired driver's licence.** Accept the citation if it is truly expired, then renew at DVLA.
- **No seatbelt, no child seat, or child in front seat.** These are real safety rules. Ask for the ticket, do not pay cash.
- **Missing fire extinguisher or warning triangle.** Ask for the written offence and official payment route.
- **Speeding.** Ask for the speed reading and the device used. A bare accusation is not evidence.
- **Mobile phone use.** If you were using a handheld phone while driving, the proper response is a citation.
- **Alcohol or drug driving.** A breathalyser or lawful test is proper. If arrested or detained, Article 14 rights apply.

The rule underneath all of this is simple. If there is an offence, there should be a record. The record protects both sides: the officer can enforce the law, and the driver can contest the allegation if it is wrong. Cash at the roadside protects only the corrupt transaction.

Vehicle impoundment is also not a bargaining tool. An officer may detain a vehicle that is unsafe for road use, such as a car with failed brakes or dangerous tyres. An officer may not hold your vehicle hostage to force a cash payment. If your vehicle is detained, ask for the written basis and note the officer's service number.

6. Your rights during a stop

The Constitution does not stay at home when you drive. Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution applies at the roadside, whether you are in Accra, Tamale, Kumasi, Ho, or on a rural road at night.¹⁰

6.1. Liberty

Article 14 protects personal liberty. A document check is not automatically an arrest. But if an officer says you cannot leave, says you are going to the station, or seizes your vehicle without explanation, you are being detained. At that point, you have the right to be told the specific legal reason in a language you understand. If you are arrested, you must be brought before a court within 48 hours.

6.2. Dignity

Article 15 protects dignity. A traffic offence does not give an officer permission to insult you, threaten you, slap you, publicly shame you, or invent consequences to frighten you. You may be wrong about the road rule and still be entitled to respectful treatment.

6.3. Fair process

Article 19 protects fair trial rights. Roadside cash skips the entire legal process. There is no evidence, no receipt, no court reference, no chance to contest the allegation, and often no actual resolution of the offence. You pay, but legally nothing has been cleaned up.

6.4. Identification and recording

Under the Police Service Regulations, a uniformed officer should be identifiable by badge or service number.¹¹ Note the service number, date, time, and location of the stop. Those details make a later complaint possible.

You may record a public officer performing a public duty in a public place, as long as you do it safely and do not obstruct the officer. If the situation feels tense, do not turn recording into a confrontation. Your safety comes first. A discreet video, a badge photo, or a written note can still matter later.

10. Republic of Ghana, *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992 (as amended 1996)*.

11. Republic of Ghana, *Police Service Regulations, 2012 (C.I. 76)*.

7. What the bribery data says

This is not just a collection of bad road stories. Ghana's own governance data shows that traffic enforcement has a serious bribery problem.

The Ghana Statistical Service Governance Series Wave 1 Report, released in May 2025, covered citizen interactions with public officials in 2024. It found that 18.4 percent of Ghanaians who dealt with public officials paid a bribe. The MTTD recorded the worst result among the institutions surveyed: about six in ten people who dealt with MTTD officials reported paying a bribe. General duties police and CID followed behind.¹²

Wave 2, covering January to June 2025, showed improvement. The MTTD bribery rate fell to 51.9 percent.¹³ That is still far too high. It still means roughly one out of every two people who dealt with a traffic officer reported paying a bribe. But the fall matters because it shows the culture can be pushed back.

Research on police corruption in Ghana helps explain why the practice lasts. A 2025 study in *International Criminology* found that some officers described bribe-taking as a supplement to low pay and as something normalized by workplace culture.¹⁴ That may explain the pressure, but it does not excuse it. A difficult job does not make extortion lawful.

The public has also learned the wrong language for the problem. Drivers call it "sorting out." Officers ask for "something." Those phrases make the act sound harmless. It is not harmless. It is bribery, and when money is demanded under threat of delay, arrest, or impoundment, it is extortion.

The damage goes beyond money. The National Road Safety Authority recorded more than 300 child deaths in road crashes in 2025.¹⁵ Safety laws matter because enforcement can save lives. When enforcement becomes a cash collection exercise, unsafe cars stay on the road, drunk drivers keep driving, and children remain unprotected.

8. The informed driver's protocol

This protocol is not about showing off or disrespecting police officers. It is about staying calm, staying legal, and leaving a record.

12. Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), *Governance Series Wave 1 Report: Bribery Incidence 2024*, technical report, Released 28 May 2025. MTTD bribery prevalence: 60%; national: 18.4%. Reported in GhanaWeb: [GhanaWeb report](#) (Ghana Statistical Service, May 2025).

13. Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), *Governance Series Wave 2 Report: Bribery Incidence January to June 2025*, technical report, MTTD bribery rate: 51.9% (Jan to Jun 2025). Reported in AllAfrica / GhanaWeb: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202511200170.html> (Ghana Statistical Service, November 2025).

14. K. A. E. Addo et al., "An Exploratory Study of Police Corruption in Ghana: Why Does It Exist?," Springer Nature. Officers normalised bribery as income supplement. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43576-022-00078-7>, *International Criminology*, March 2025,

15. National Road Safety Authority (NRSA) Ghana, *Road Crash Statistics, Ghana, January to August 2025*, NRSA Ghana, Over 300 children killed in road crashes in 2025. <https://nrsga.gov.gh>, 2025.

8.1. Before you drive

Keep the four documents current: licence, roadworthy certificate, insurance, and registration. Keep paper copies together and digital copies on your phone. Check that your lights, indicators, tyres, horn, wipers, brakes, fire extinguisher, and warning triangle are in order. If your side windows are tinted, know the VLT level. Save CHRAJ's toll-free number, **0800-800-900**, in your contacts.

8.2. When you are stopped

Pull over safely and keep your hands visible. Greet the officer. Notice the service number or name tag without making a scene. Present the four documents when asked. If the officer alleges an offence, ask calmly: "Officer, what specific offence are you citing?" Then ask for the written ticket.

Do not volunteer extra explanations. Nervous talking often gives a dishonest officer more room to pressure you. Short, polite answers work better.

8.3. If cash pressure starts

Lower your voice. Do not argue. Say: "I cannot pay cash at the roadside. Please issue a ticket so I can pay through the official channel." If the officer threatens arrest or vehicle seizure, ask for the legal basis. If you are detained, say calmly that Article 14 gives you the right to know the reason for the detention.

Do not physically resist. Do not insult the officer. Do not block traffic to make a point. If the situation becomes unsafe, protect yourself first and report later.

8.4. After the stop

Write down the service number, date, time, location, and what was demanded. Report extortion to CHRAJ, the Ghana Police Service Professional Standards Bureau, MTTD command, or a credible civic media outlet if you have evidence of a pattern. In October 2025, video evidence from Sampa led to interdictions within days.¹⁶ Complaints work best when they include names, numbers, places, and proof.

16. YEN.com.gh, *Ghana Police Corruption: Officers Caught on Camera Soliciting Bribes at Sampa*, YEN.com.gh, Bono Regional Police Command interdictions followed within days. <https://yen.com.gh/ghana/293719-ghana-police-corruption-officers-caught-camera-soliciting-bribes-sampa/>, October 2025.

9. What Act 1153 changed

The Road Traffic Amendment Act, 2025 (Act 1153) came into force in early 2026 and updates several parts of Ghana's road safety law.¹⁷ The World Health Organisation described the amendment as bringing Ghana largely in line with its road safety legal recommendations.¹⁸

The changes are practical. They affect drinking and driving, child safety, mobile phones, rest breaks, vehicle safety equipment, and commercial motorcycles or tricycles.

Area	Current rule to know
Alcohol	Private drivers: 0.05% BAC. Commercial drivers: 0.02% BAC.
Child safety	Children under 12 should not sit in the front seat. Child restraints are required up to age 12.
Mobile phones	Handheld phone use while driving is prohibited. Use hands-free only.
Fatigue	Drivers should take at least 30 minutes of rest after four hours of continuous driving.
Motorcycles and tricycles	Commercial use is subject to licensing, registration, and safety rules.

These rules are not traps. They exist because road crashes kill. Ghana recorded more than 300 child road deaths in 2025, so the child safety rules should be taken seriously.¹⁹

The same distinction still applies. If an officer enforces Act 1153 properly, cooperate with the citation or lawful test. A breathalyser test for suspected drunk driving is proper. A written ticket for a child-safety offence is proper. A demand for roadside cash is not proper, even when the underlying law is real.

10. The officer works for the public

Article 1(1) of the Constitution says Ghana's sovereignty resides in the people, and that government power is exercised in their name and for their welfare.²⁰ That includes the power carried by the officer at your window.

This does not mean you outrank an officer during a stop. It means the officer's authority has a purpose and a limit. The purpose is public safety and lawful enforcement. The limit is

17. Parliament of Ghana, *Road Traffic Amendment Act, 2025 (Act 1153)*.

18. World Health Organisation (WHO), *Ghana's New Road Traffic Law and Safety Standards Will Save Lives*, WHO, WHO statement on Act 1153 bringing Ghana into line with WHO road safety legal recommendations. <https://www.who.int/news/item/30-04-2026-ghana-s-new-road-traffic-law-and-safety-standards-will-save-lives>, April 2026.

19. National Road Safety Authority (NRSA) Ghana, *Road Crash Statistics, Ghana, January to August 2025*.

20. Republic of Ghana, *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992 (as amended 1996)*.

the Constitution and the statutes that created the office.

Corruption flips that relationship. The public servant starts behaving like a ruler, and the citizen starts behaving like a subject. A driver who calmly asks for a written ticket is not being rude. The driver is asking the agent of the public to use public power in the public way.

This point also protects honest officers. The answer to bribery is not to treat every MTTD officer as an enemy. Many officers work under difficult conditions, and the research on police corruption points to poor pay and command culture as part of the problem.²¹ Better pay, training, supervision, and equipment matter. So does personal responsibility. Low pay does not legalize a bribe.

The working formula for citizens is short: law, literacy, action, accountability. The law gives the rules. Literacy tells you what they mean. Action is the calm request for a citation, the service number you write down, and the complaint you file when an officer crosses the line.

11. Recommendations

11.1. For drivers

Keep your documents current, know your expiry dates, and check insurance before you drive. Learn one sentence and use it every time: "Please write me a ticket so I can address this through the proper channel." If an officer demands money, note the service number and report the encounter.

11.2. For civil society and media

Turn road rights into local-language radio, video, and WhatsApp explainers. Many drivers who suffer the worst extortion will not read a legal paper, but they will listen to a three-minute Twi, Ewe, Ga, Hausa, or Dagbani explanation. Civil society groups should also monitor known extortion points and publish patterns backed by evidence.

11.3. For the Ghana Police Service

Train every traffic officer on Act 683, L.I. 2180, Act 1153, and the requirement to issue citations instead of taking cash. Publish quarterly Professional Standards Bureau data showing complaints, investigations, and outcomes by region and unit. Body cameras at high-risk checkpoints would also protect citizens and honest officers.

21. Addo et al., "An Exploratory Study of Police Corruption in Ghana: Why Does It Exist?"

11.4. For Parliament

Move traffic enforcement away from cash. Digital citations, SMS notices, QR-code payment, and court-linked payment channels would remove the roadside bargaining space. Parliament should also strengthen the independence of police complaints systems, fund proper equipment, and make prosecutions for soliciting bribes real rather than theoretical.

12. Conclusion

In October 2025, a video from Sampa showed police officers taking money from motorists at a checkpoint. Within days, the Bono Regional Police Command identified and interdicted the officers involved.²² The lesson is not that every driver should become a journalist. The lesson is that a record changes what institutions can ignore.

The law already gives drivers more protection than many drivers realize. You have the right to know why you are being detained. You have the right to dignity. You have the right to a fair process. You have the right to ask for the specific offence and a written citation. If your documents are expired or your car is unsafe, fix the problem and accept the lawful consequence. But do not confuse a lawful consequence with roadside cash.

Roadside extortion survives because too many people have been taught to fear the uniform more than they trust the law. That can change. A driver who knows the four documents, understands the tint rule, refuses cash payments politely, and reports misconduct is harder to exploit.

You are not a subject at a checkpoint. You are a citizen. Drive like one.

22. YEN.com.gh, *Ghana Police Corruption: Officers Caught on Camera Soliciting Bribes at Sampa*.

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YEN.com.gh. *Ghana Police Corruption: Officers Caught on Camera Soliciting Bribes at Sampa*. YEN.com.gh. Bono Regional Police Command interdictions followed within days. <https://yen.com.gh/ghana/293719-ghana-police-corruption-officers-caught-camera-soliciting-bribes-sampa/>, October 2025.